“I stopped to think”

Aboriginal anti-racism pedagogy in Middle School

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Declaration

‘I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.’

Mr Adam Paul Heaton

18 December 2013
# Glossary

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority</td>
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<td>AEP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Policy</td>
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<td>AFL</td>
<td>Australian Football League</td>
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<td>AGD</td>
<td>Attorney General’s Department</td>
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<td>AIHW</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare</td>
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<td>AITSL</td>
<td>Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership</td>
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<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
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<td>CDU HREC</td>
<td>Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>CERD</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination</td>
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<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a second language</td>
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<tr>
<td>DETE</td>
<td>Department of Education, Training and Employment</td>
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<td>FaHCSIA</td>
<td>Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Australians (Australian Government)</td>
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<td>IIU</td>
<td>Indigenous Issues Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>LACSS</td>
<td>Los Angeles County Social Surveys</td>
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<td>LSIC</td>
<td>Longitudinal Studies of Indigenous Australians</td>
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<td>MATSITI</td>
<td>More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCEETYA</td>
<td>Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>NAIDOC</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee</td>
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<td>NASP</td>
<td>National Association of School Psychologists</td>
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<td>NATSISS</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>SACS</td>
<td>South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability</td>
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<td>SCSEEC</td>
<td>Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEL</td>
<td>Social and Emotional Learning</td>
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<td>SES</td>
<td>socio-economic status</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLT</td>
<td>Transformative Learning Theory</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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Abstract

This thesis seeks to address the ongoing problem of racism in Australian society, particularly towards Aboriginal Australians, through facilitating an anti-racism program of learning to middle school students, and researching these students’ perceived outcomes. Social and media discourse often present Aboriginal people, who comprise 2.4 per cent of the population, with pejorative images that inevitably shape attitudes—including those of young Australians.

Learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures has recently become a priority of Australian state and National Curriculum Framework. These inclusions provide opportunities to ameliorate race relations. With only 1 per cent of Australian teachers identifying as Indigenous, all educators must contribute to ensure that students engage in learning about Aboriginal peoples.

This study explores how I, a white, non-Aboriginal, middle school teacher, in consultation with Aboriginal elders, designed a program of learning with anti-racism education as the core agenda. The program engaged students in my English classes with discourses drawn from Aboriginal peoples’ experiences, past and present. These provided cause for students to reconsider some of their assumptions, and view Aboriginal peoples in a more contextualised and empathetic light. The students produced reflective, critical and creative narratives and expositions in response to these materials. This study seeks to identify if engagement in critical thinking, reflection, imagination, empathy and emotion led them to question any stereotypes and opinions they may have at first held.
This study seeks to expand middle school pedagogy by finding strong reverberations with transformative learning theory drawn from adult education. Keeping in mind differences between adolescents and adults, this theory provides a platform from which to understand how learning about Aboriginal cultures and social experiences inevitably involves unsettling dilemmas, but can also provide students opportunities to re-evaluate their views toward Aboriginal Australians.
Chapter 1 The enquiry
'It’s not her fault, she’s 13, she’s still so innocent, I don’t put any blame on her.’ (Adam Goodes, as reported by Crawford, 2013, May 25).

Aboriginal footballer Adam Goodes made this statement to the media the day after a 13-year-old girl shouted at him, calling him an ‘ape’. The incident occurred on 24 May 2013, during the opening game of the Australian Football League’s (AFL) Indigenous Round—a week that celebrates Aboriginal cultures and achievements. Crawford (2013), from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) News reports that the two-time winner of the AFL best and fairest award stated he was ‘heartbroken’ that a child had shouted racist abuse at him. Goodes went on to explain it was not the first time he and other Aboriginal footballers have been called ‘monkey’, ‘ape’ and other racist taunts, including earlier that game.

The girl was also affected by the racism she echoed—embarrassed as she was escorted out of the stadium by security. The next morning she was given the opportunity to phone Goodes to apologise for the incident. After apologising she told him she had not known it is racist to call an Aboriginal person an ape. Goodes accepted her apology and explained to her what the term means to Aboriginal people.

‘Unfortunately it’s what she hears in the environment she’s grown up in that has made her think that it’s OK to call people names,’ Goodes said. ‘It’s what our parents are teaching our kids. We’ve just got to help educate society better so it doesn’t happen again’ (Crawford, 2013, May 25).
1.1 The value of anti-racism education in Australia

The Goode’s incident highlights the value of anti-racism education in Australia. Other news stories as well as studies, such as the *Longitudinal study of Indigenous children* by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013), likewise report that racism is still experienced by Aboriginal Australians. Chapter 2 reviews these reports and studies into demonstrations of prejudice and discrimination by children and adolescents. This current study explores ways middle school education can better understand attitudes toward Aboriginal people, and perhaps ameliorate them.

Into the second decade of the twenty first century, Aboriginal Australians continue to be impacted by racism stemming from British colonisation in 1788. It was only as recently as 1967 that Aboriginal people were counted as people—before then they came under the *Flora and Fauna Act* of the Australian Constitution in 1901—after 10 years of activism by civil rights campaigners, including through petitions and lobbying politicians (Haxton, 2007). There remains great disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in health, housing, employment, education and life expectancy (FaHCSIA, 2013). Only in the past 20 years have there been meaningful attempts to bridge this disparity, but the divide remains large (Craven, 2011). Craven details numerous Aboriginal leaders have fought for equality, including Eddie Mabo in his struggle for land rights, and Lowitja O’Donahue in her advocacy for social justice. So too have numerous non-Aboriginal Australians, including the Australian Government (2008) by the then prime minister, Kevin Rudd, who apologised to the Stolen Generations—Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander children who from the 1920s to the 1970s were forcibly removed from their families in accordance with what was then Australian state and territory government policy.

Despite some forward steps there have also been numerous backward steps. The first Australian Government department to provide Indigenous Australians with self-determination, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), survived a scant 10 years before it was disestablished in 2003. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP, 2006), elaborated on in Section 2.2.2, outlines numerous rights of Indigenous people, including in relation to their education and positive self representation. However, there are many people in society, including in school communities, who it appears do not extend these rights to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Despite the growing presence of Aboriginal people in sports, politics, the arts and other public domains, there remains unscrutinised racism in society, which, as Goodes surmised, may be perpetuated by parents to their children.

Racism stifles the intellectual, social and emotional development of children, adolescents and adults, making it difficult for them to look beyond narrow frames of reference (Citron, 1969). Anti-racism education is also of course in the best interest of recipients of racism, due to the psychological distress that racism can cause (Paradies, Harris & Anderson, 2008), resulting an adverse health outcomes (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2005; Indigenous Issues Unit [IIU, 2006]. There has been progress in the last 20 years by Australian states and territories in the development of curricula that endorses teaching and learning about past and present Aboriginal cultures and experiences. The South Australian
Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) framework was developed by the Government of SA Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) in 2001. The SACSA framework (DETE, 2001, p. 293) outlines middle school inclusions for learning about ‘power relationships, inequality and the distribution of wealth in society’. In this framework DETE (2001, p. 293) encourages middle school students to explore ‘diverse perspectives on the past, and other places, cultures, societies and social systems’ to ‘widen their perspectives on today’s issues and … to shape change’. In 2011 the teaching of Aboriginal histories and cultures became a cross-curricular priority in the Australian curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013b). More so, the challenge for high quality teaching is set by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2014) in the second of its seven standards in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Standard 2.4 states teachers should aspire to proficiently provide opportunities to ‘students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages’. It also states that teachers should aspire to reach a level of high accomplishment in how they support colleagues with providing opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

As the teacher and researcher in this study I drew upon these curricula provisions as well as literature on anti-racism education and the subject or learning area of Aboriginal Studies (reviewed in Chapter 2) to facilitate learning opportunities for students to increase their understanding about Aboriginal people.
Although the teaching of Aboriginal histories and cultures has been a state and territory curriculum inclusion for some time now, and more recently a cross-curriculum priority (a priority area of learning that stretches across the curriculum) in the National Curriculum Framework, schools maintain autonomy over what they teach. Schools can choose whether to or not teach about Aboriginal people, and hence provide Aboriginal people with a voice—a voice that has often not been heard (Craven, 2011)—including the closure of ATSIC. However, according to the University of South Australia [UniSA] (2012) in the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI, 2012), only 1 per cent of Australian teachers are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This, as well as arguments from Bell (2002) from a United States (US) context, emphasises the need for white and non-white teachers to achieve multicultural learning outcomes among their cohorts.

Craven (2011) argues that both non-Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal teachers need to work together to teach all Australian students Aboriginal Studies, which was also a conclusion from my Honour’s study (Heaton, 2007). Katz (2002) concurs that in societies where white people comprise the majority of the population, white people need to contribute to multiculturalism and anti-racism educational efforts. This said, non-Aboriginal teachers may not feel equipped to teach about Aboriginal cultures and experiences (West, 1999), and the autonomy of schools and teachers can lead to such curriculum components being omitted—even if it is a cross-curriculum priority.

This study explores with what effect I as a white non-Aboriginal teacher—with some advice and involvement from Aboriginal educators and elders—may facilitate learning about Aboriginal people, cultures and experiences. As a white non-
Aboriginal teacher, I cannot completely relate to the experiences of racism that the Aboriginal elders and educators advised me they and many other Aboriginal people continue to face. Carrim (2001) places emphasis on anti-racism educators recognising their own race, gender and other aspects of their identity. The program introduced students to some components of the cultures and social experiences of Aboriginal people, that sought to show some of the wide diversity across Aboriginal Australia. This introduction also invited students, in their appreciation of such diversity, to reconsider their preconceived views of and feelings towards Aboriginal people.

A short definitional piece on descriptors such as ‘white’, ‘Indigenous’, ‘Aboriginal’, and ‘non-Indigenous’ are usually helpful in such research, and should be included in revision, especially because I imagine that not all the students in this study were ‘white’ and the reason for choosing ‘Aboriginal’ needs to be discussed in context of some of the international agreements about such descriptors. Also, it is important to clearly discuss what happened to the non-white, non-Indigenous members of the class in this work? (This links in part to a discussion on p. 26 but should be discussed earlier in the thesis).

Although Indigenous Australians includes Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people, students in this study only learned about Aboriginal people. Of the approximately 700,000 Indigenous people in Australia there are 48,000 Torres Strait Islanders—6,000 who live in the area of the Torres Strait and 42,000 who live outside of this area, mostly in the north of Queensland on the mainland of Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2012). South Australia (SA) is home to 5.6 per cent of the Indigenous population in Australia, with 2.3 per cent of SA’s
population identifying as Indigenous; almost entirely Aboriginal (ABS, 2012). News reporting and social discourse about Indigenous Australians in SA (and most other Australian states and territories) is usually specifically about Aboriginal people.

Also, due to the limited number of the lessons able to be allocated to the theme of racism and learning about one group of people, the focus of the program of learning was specifically on Aboriginal people. The subject of Aboriginal Studies, rather than Indigenous studies has been (particularly in the 1990s) a standalone area of teaching and learning in Australian schools. It must be mentioned, though, that at times in this study when reference is given to other studies and also the National Curriculum Framework, that Indigenous (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) people are referred to for consistency with these other studies and curricula (see earlier in this section for an elaboration of the use of Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islander people and Indigenous Australians).

This study, stemming from the review of literature in Chapter 2, places large emphasis on the concepts of whiteness and white privilege. Historically, racism, comprising notions of superiority over people of other ‘races’ or ethnicities, has often (but not exclusively) been demonstrated by white people, including in their exploration and invasion of new lands (elaborated on in Chapter Three). Australia was settled, or invaded, and colonised by Britain—notably white people, although many non-white, non-Indigenous people also. Today, Australia’s population is still largely of white or Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celtic ancestry, as well as people of myriad other non-white and non-Indigenous Australians. As stated above, Indigenous Australians, comprising of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, represent only 2.3 per cent of the population. The population of the two classes of students in
this study reflected this—one of the 47 students, only 1 was Aboriginal, most were of white ancestry (Australian but of British, Irish and other European descent), while numerous were non-white and non-Indigenous—of families of Romanian, African and other ethnicities (although they are also Australian). Although not all the students in this study were white, and nor are all the students in other studies of teaching and learning about white and whiteness, the students are located and developmentally shaped in a white oriented society, developed over two hundred years by people and social structures largely from Britain as well as from the United States of America. Messages of white superiority abound—the large majority of celebrated models, actors, scientists, sportspeople and other people of high status are white. It is in this society that the students in this study were shaped and developed their opinions of and attitudes towards Indigenous Australians. However, it must still be remembered that not all the students in this study were white (elaborated on further below in Section 1.2).

1.2 The research site

In this study, I explore whether Year 8 (12 to 14-year-old) students in two English classes (the first in 2009 and the second in 2010) held any preconceptions about Aboriginal people, and whether they might alter any of these that might be negative. Due to only being able to allocate a limited number of middle school English lessons to the theme of racism and Aboriginal Studies, I developed a new program of learning. The program was designed and facilitated at an Independent school (i.e. in the private, not public school sector) in SA—referred to as ‘the School’ in this study. The School was established by a minority Christian denomination in a low socio-economic status (SES) suburb in northern Adelaide, SA.
The aims of the School included equipping students to help ‘others in need’ through willing service to the community. During 2009 and 2010, when this study was conducted, students donating to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal, and participating in a walkathon to raise money for a mission to the Philippines (with several Year 11 students partaking in the trip) exemplified their service to the community. However, there were no extra-curricular activities with the local community, and the curriculum did not provide for students to interact with other ethnic or cultural groups. Five students in the school population of over 500 identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. While some identified as having Asian or African ancestry, the remainder had various European backgrounds—a number Romanian, but mostly British. Some students spoke English as a second language (ESL), but the school policy was to speak English at school with no ESL classes on offer. None of the 47 Year 8 students in the two English classes who engaged in this study indicated they knew about more than three Aboriginal people—and most of these were in the media. The students did not know that the Aboriginal student in Class A was Aboriginal. The School curriculum paid scant attention to cultural and ethnic diversity and shied from examination of social equality. Students were insulated from the highly multicultural population in the suburbs surrounding them.

Due to my interest in multicultural and anti-racism education the principal invited me to be the multicultural ambassador. I accepted and started to explore what could be added to existing activities around the School to the few, sporadic, low key classroom-based initiatives on offer. In previous years the students’ Aboriginal Studies classes extended to hearing one or two Dreaming stories detailing some Aboriginal groups’ beliefs about the creation of the land, sky and sea, but had not
learned any context about the associated Aboriginal cultures. West (1999) explains that such a lack of context perpetuates stereotypes and prejudice. The students in this study indicated they had developed their understandings about Aboriginal people from social influences—particularly from conversations with family and friends, and from messages on the radio and television.

However, I saw resemblances between the school’s core values of ‘opportunity’, ‘hope’ and ‘respect’ and anti-racism educational initiatives. I also perceived resonance with the school’s ‘Do Unto Other’ anti-bullying policy that captures Jesus Christ’s teachings ‘and as you would like and desire that men would do to you, do exactly so to them’ (Luke Chapter 6 verse 31, in the Amplified Version of the Holy Bible) and ‘love your neighbour as you do yourself’ (Matthew Chapter 19 verse 19, in the Amplified Version of the Holy Bible). The school supported my request to conduct this study in order that I may glean insight into what thoughts and feelings—or attitudes—students had, and how they might alter any negative attitudes toward Aboriginal people through an anti-racism educational initiative.

1.3 The anti-racism education initiative

In order to examine how Australian middle school education may challenge and perhaps alter any unfavourable preconceptions of Aboriginal people students might hold, I was curious to know their initial perspectives. I was, and remain, mindful not to presume or report demonstrated prejudice, but rather draw upon the students’ responses and personal reflections to identify their perspectives about and feelings toward (or their attitudes toward) Aboriginal people. York (2003) reports that the language and behaviour of children beginning in the early years often reflects
prejudices they observe in their social surrounds. York recognises that most adults may disagree or deny that children in the early years take notice of prejudice. Tenorio (2006, p. 20) agrees that even from the early years (1-5 years of age) children are not ‘colorblind’, but often commence developing an understanding of race related differences and power relationships—in regard to who to include and exclude. Christensen (2007) details what Dorfman (1983) refers to as a ‘secret education’, that Christensen (2007, p. 4) paraphrases as ‘instructs young people to accept the world as it is portrayed in these social blueprints’. Christensen (2007, p. 4) continues that the message conveyed often ‘depicts the domination of one sex, one race, one class, or one country over a weaker counterpart’. She explains that children pick up these messages from viewing storybooks, films and nursery rhymes that present white people as superior—as kings, queens and heroes, and non-whites as inferior—as jokers, villains and savages. I entered this study inquisitive to know if their social surrounds might have influenced the Year 8 students in my English classes, and how they have come to view Aboriginal people in general.

In light of these contexts, I developed and facilitated the program of learning with the themes of racism and Aboriginal people among middle school English students. Like Childs (2007, p. 141), who sought to teach social justice without depressing students and not to ‘perpetuate a view of victimisation’, the program contained stimuli in the form of positive messages about, and images of, Aboriginal people that might contrast the social and media discourse about them that is often pejorative—discourse which Pedersen and Walker (2000) explain presents Aboriginal people negatively and stereotypically. Pedersen and Walker (2000, p. 183) found that 60 Anglo 6–12 year old children held ‘ingroup’ preferences—preferring the traits of
typical traits of Anglos compared to Aboriginal people, and hence identified the need for significant structural change in the education system.

The design of the program explored in this study sought to allow students to engage in a new discourse, in which they might consider alternative representations of Aboriginal people while learning about some past and present Aboriginal cultures and experiences. It aimed to provide students opportunity to independently reflect on what they were learning about, and produce creative and critical literary responses in the form of narratives and expositions. They might also reflect on preconceptions they may have held—for, as the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (2013) reports, prejudices can evolve to acts of discrimination when left unchecked. Accordingly, the program carried the potential to better prepare the students to contribute to a more inclusive society. I was curious about whether the students would develop and demonstrate expressions of ‘allophilia’ which is derived from the ancient Greek words for ‘liking’ or ‘love’ of the ‘other’ (Pittinsky, 2009)—the ‘other’ being Aboriginal people in the case of this study.

In recognising my whiteness (as recommended by Martin-McDonald & McCarthy, 2008), and my inability to fully relate to the experiences of Aboriginal Australians in relation to racism and disadvantage, I consulted with Aboriginal educators and elders to ascertain what components of Aboriginal cultures and experiences should be taught. Through this consultation, the program engaged the students in critical thinking and reflective reasoning that incorporated and resonated with numerous components of anti-racism pedagogy (as reviewed in Section 2.2.2). As well as extensively reviewing literature on racism, anti-racism education and Aboriginal Studies to plan the program, I drew upon my own anecdotal observations of the
racism I have observed, including comments and ‘jokes’ directed towards Aboriginal people.

The 16-lesson program (detailed in Section 3.1.1) prepared students to engage respectfully with an Aboriginal elder in the final lesson, and to generally start perceiving and feeling more positively towards Aboriginal people. In this final lesson a cultural educator from the Ngarrendjeri language group in SA to whom I gave the pseudonym Stef, and one of the Aboriginal elders, was consulted in the design of the program, and in this lesson she shared her perspectives with the students. This final lesson was the pinnacle moment of the program of learning, with the preceding 15 lessons serving to prepare the students to engage openly, respectfully and appreciatively with her. The program facilitated opportunities for students to look at their beliefs, to think critically about Australian society, and to empathise with Aboriginal people.

This study explores students’ expressions of cognitive and affective empathy as they identified resemblances between some of their own personal social experiences and some aspects of the experiences of Aboriginal people. For instance, it explores how students recalled how it felt to be lost temporarily in a public place in order to start imagining, albeit in a limited way, how an Aboriginal child might have felt during and after being taken away from their family. The students, however, recognised that they of course could not relate completely to these experiences, and hence could not fully understand the past and present circumstances of disadvantage experienced by a large proportion of the Aboriginal population. Identifying and exploring some resemblances assisted many students to commence considering the impact of racial
prejudice and discrimination on Aboriginal people and communities, and begin the process of developing empathy.

The teaching and learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as a new Australian cross-curriculum priority applies across all learning areas. This includes the strand of learning entitled English and more specifically English Literacy—the strand encompassing the essential capability of developing intercultural understandings, which includes empathy (ACARA, 2013b). The curriculum offerings for learning about ethnic minorities and racism are not new in the learning area of English. For example, middle school and high school English curricula often include studies of literature such as the novels *Deadly Unna* (about interracial friendship, set in SA) or *To Kill A Mockingbird* (dealing with racial inequality in America).

In this current study, rather than conducting one long study of a single text, I presented a selection of resources, such as newspaper articles, poems, songs, documentaries, films, and games, to introduce some past and present cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people. These various items presented alternative representations of Aboriginal people that counter the negative stereotypes prevalent in social and media discourse. These representations showed resilience, responsibility and gentleness exhibited by Indigenous Australians in their community interactions while they were simultaneously experiencing social injustices. The students engaged in critical thinking about Australian society, reflected, and incorporated their new learning about Aboriginal people into their writing.

By presenting alternative, positive depictions of Aboriginal people throughout the program, and encouraging students to develop narratives and expositions in response
to their learning, I hoped to see them more fully appreciate or admire the cultures and accomplishments of Aboriginal people, and perhaps find some outrage and sympathy towards past and present social injustices that I contextualised. Specifically, and overall, I sought to discover:

*If middle school students’ engagement with an anti-racism learning program will alter their cognitive and affective responses toward Aboriginal Australians?*

Structured and purposeful teaching was intended to provide students opportunity to:

- challenge their previous understandings about Australian society
- increase their awareness of social privilege enjoyed by many Australians (especially white Australians) that are often denied Aboriginal Australians
- in light of past and present oppressions experienced by Aboriginal people, respond with empathy
- extend their understanding of the impact of racism
- appreciate past and present Aboriginal cultures and achievements.

The opportunity to consolidate and articulate their new understandings of Australian society in their critical and creative literary responses was predominantly achieved through imagining the perceptions of an Aboriginal character to tell their story. Demonstrations of empathy in their narrative writing are explored in Chapter 7 to give insight into how the new National Curriculum Framework essential capability of intercultural understanding, and specifically empathy, can be achieved, and if it can assist in softening and perhaps altering their perspectives—thoughts as well as feelings—toward Aboriginal people.
The resources presented in the first few lessons highlighted various past and ongoing activities of Aboriginal people, depicting joy, fun and peace in Aboriginal communities. I then provided opportunities for students to learn about events stemming from colonisation; the devastation experienced by Aboriginal communities during events of genocide and the forcible removal of children, through to the ongoing forms of racism and disadvantage Indigenous Australians experience today.

I hoped that learning about the positive qualities and responses of Aboriginal people, and then learning about their contemporary achievements and contributions to Australian society, would enable students to see Indigenous Australians in new ways. Students might indicate these new ways through their self-reported perspectives about Aboriginal people—their pre-program and post-program survey responses—which may provide an indication of their initial and perhaps altered thoughts and feelings toward Aboriginal people. These responses might also be strengthened by their richer reflections on their learning experiences, including on their old and new perspectives and feelings toward Aboriginal people.

As I reflected on the students’ responses, both while facilitating the program of learning and following its completion, I engaged in a process of thematic analysis. During this analysis I observed some resemblance between students’ responses and the learning processes and outcomes in transformative learning theory (TLT). This is expanded in the following section.

1.4 Through the lens of transformative learning

This study explores the ways students’ thoughts and feelings toward Aboriginal people might be disoriented, challenged, reflected on and perhaps altered—which
does not lend itself to typical middle school pedagogies or learning theories. When analysing the students’ responses to and reflections on the program and what they learned, resemblances with TLT emerged—particularly aspects of a disorienting dilemma, critical analysis, reflection and perspective transformation. Some components of the possible place and role of learners’ emotions and attitudes in TLT also resonated with the students’ learning experiences. TLT provided a useful starting point for exploring and discussing the adolescents’ learning experience in this study.

TLT is an adult learning theory, with the pinnacle outcome of a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978). Mezirow (1978, p. 100) explains that a perspective transformation involves stopping reliving our history, and experiencing structural changes to the way we see ourselves and other people. New perspectives may be more inclusive, discriminating and integrative of experience, and may lead to changing behaviours and taking action. Transformation comprises a permanent (Courtenay, Merriam & Reeves, 1998) or ‘irreversible’ change (O’Sullivan, 2003, p. 328), and is only occasionally experienced by adult learners (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (2000) explains adult learners have a tendency to integrate with their experience what they know, their traditions and assumptions, to avoid the threat of chaos. Children and adolescents are classified as being at a conventional level of moral development (Colby, Gibbs, Lieberman and Kohlberg, 1983; Walker, 1989) and I wondered if they would show the more abstract moral reasoning required to seek justice beyond their immediate spheres. Possibly too their perspectives might well change back after the learning experience. While the resemblances provide a useful starting point, I am clear that adolescents may well be at a very different stage
in their development to adults. Their perspectives and attitudes are still being formed and are directly influenced by the discourses around them, while adults have had more years to weigh many contesting viewpoints on many issues, and have hence tried, tested and settled on worldviews. Accordingly, I did not explore whether the students in my classes experienced transformative learning, but whether they experienced some degree of reflection, disorientation and alteration of thoughts and feelings (attitudes) during the program of learning. This study explored to what degree adolescence, or middle school education, can generate effective anti-racism learning outcomes, albeit the formation of new perspectives and feelings that may or may not remain with them into adulthood.

Although the adolescent-aged students in this study engaged in an educational experiences that resonated with aspects of TLT, it must be remembered that they were still largely engaging in ‘formative’ learning. They had not previously learned much at all about Aboriginal Australians, and hence their learning was new and developmental. The components of their learning that resembled TLT, including their perspectives and feelings being disoriented and at times altered, also reflects formative learning experiences among children and adolescents as elaborated on by Bigelow (2007a), Wolpert (2006) and others, as summarised in Section 2.3. As their learning is formative (despite resembling components of TLT), learning outcomes might comprise students not needing to unlearn their racism later in life as adult learners.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature presenting the need, or rationale, for Australian middle school anti-racism education, in the context of Aboriginal Studies, by first identifying the racism that Aboriginal Australians still experience, and how children
can repeat the discourses they observe. I identify the resemblance of anti-racism education for children and adolescents with some aspects of TLT in the second half of the literature review.

Before exploring the students’ engagement in the program of learning, Chapter 3 outlines the three-phased process of applying the research methods of designing and facilitating the program, collecting students’ responses, and analysing these responses. While the study is qualitative, some quantified data complement the students’ rich reflections and responses, and reveal significant patterns and anomalies.

Chapter 4 draws upon concepts of a disorienting dilemma in TLT to explore if there was any disorientation of the students’ initial perspectives—and if there was what form it took. First, it explores if any disorientation was required and seeks to establish what their preconceptions of Aboriginal people might be. It explores the types of disorientations experienced as they learned new aspects about Aboriginal people and particularly about their cultures, social experiences and achievements. These disorientations preceded the students engaging in a new discourse, and Chapter 5 explores some resonance with critical thinking and reflection. Chapter 5 also recognises that through the students’ engagement in critical thinking, a new discourse emerged that could appreciate Aboriginal cultures and accomplishments and empathise with Aboriginal peoples’ experiences of injustice.

Chapter 6 explores whether the program of learning assisted the students to alter any of their perspectives about Aboriginal people, and if so, the types and range of any perspective alterations. Cognitive-based perspectives are only a part of an attitude though, and Chapter 7 discusses the empathetic engagement from students, and
Chapter 8 seeks to understand if there were any changes in the students’ feelings toward Aboriginal people from learning about them, by drawing upon forms of allophilia (elaborated on in Section 8.2).

In Chapter 9, I reflect on the key features of the students’ learning experiences, and the need for collaborative efforts among the whole school and wider (including the Aboriginal) community. This concluding chapter also provides my reflections and suggestions for teachers, as well as researchers, to continue to investigate the value of anti-racism education in middle schools.
Chapter 2  A review of literature
This study, and in particular the program of learning—aimed towards having middle school students challenge and perhaps change any negative attitudes they might hold towards Aboriginal Australians—was informed by the literature. Evidence of the need for anti-racism education is provided in the literature on racism experienced by Aboriginal people, and on how children can be influenced by social and media discourse. This chapter commences by reviewing the literature that presents a rationale for Australian middle school anti-racism education in the context of learning about the Aboriginal population.

This chapter then reviews the place and function of critical thinking, reflection, imagination, empathy, appreciation, respect and creative writing in anti-racism education, before identifying reverberations with Aboriginal Studies and new Australian state and national cross-curriculum priorities.

Keeping in mind the differences between adults and adolescents (introduced in Chapter 1)—particularly in relation to developmental stages and learning capacities—a review of a variety of Australian and international anti-racism learning processes and outcomes that resemble aspects of TLT follows. These aspects frame the second half of the review, which commences the investigation into whether and how the Australian middle school students might reframe their attitudes through the anti-racism educational initiative.
2.1 Rationale for anti-racism education in Australian schools

The literature makes a case for anti-racism education in Australian middle schools. For just one example, Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Odell and Wang (2010) state schools need to send a consistent, clear message of support for teachers who initiate opportunities for students to learn about race-related and other forms of social justice. Research has found that children and adolescents are influenced by the race-related discourses around them, and their speech and interactions can echo the racism they observe. First, the rationale for anti-racism education in middle school is built on a review of historical and contemporary racism experienced by Aboriginal Australians—including in social and media discourse.

2.2.1 Past and present racism experienced by Aboriginal Australians

Since British arrival in Australia in 1788, race-related attitudes have often been present between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. For many of the new, white, non-Aboriginal Australians around the time of first arrival, these attitudes to the ‘other’ were largely based on notions of superiority—including ideologies of biological superiority that embody the concept of racism presented by Derman-Sparks and Phillips (2000, pp. 15–16), and the structural theories of racism and racialised social systems explored by Bonilla-Silva (1997).

Charles Darwin briefly visited Australia in 1836, some 48 years after British arrival and colonisation, and after scant observation concluded that Aboriginal people were not fit to survive as they had less desirable traits than other ‘races’ (Barlow, 2005). Such preconceptions of Aboriginal people influenced not only acceptance of the invasion of Aboriginal land, but also acts of genocide (Kinnane, 2009) and the less-
intentional outbreak of viruses that decimated the Aboriginal population. Webb and Enstice (1998, pp. 62, 74) report that from the late eighteenth century, Aboriginal people were commonly classified as animals, which resulted in displacement from good land, and encountering starvation, disease and mass murder.

The impact of colonisation continued into the early to late twentieth century with the enactment of the White Australia Policy in 1901 (Perkins & Langton, 2009). The White Australia Policy survived 73 years before being phased out in 1973 in response to international and national law and legal protective policies, such as anti-discrimination laws (Hafez, 2011). However, its legacy remained as an attitude, ideology and value toward non-white Australians—immigrants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Birrell, 1995; Davidson, 1997; Gunew, 1994). Hafez (2011, p. ix) states ‘Australia’s long experience of the White Australia Policy continues to guide significant political, social and moral aspects of citizenship’.

The assimilation policies of the 1950s sought to force Aboriginal people (as well as non-European migrants to Australia) to embrace the values and behaviours of Australians with European backgrounds (Bandler & Fox, 1983). Incredible damage was caused during this time by state and territory policies that permitted the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families in order that the children may learn white ways of thinking and behaving. Only in the 1970s did state governments cease permitting the forcible removal of children from their families. The impact of dividing families and communities remains today.

However, there have been some improvements in recent years—albeit slow in coming. In 1967, 19 years after Article 25.1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948* was enacted, the Australian referendum determined that Section 127 of
the Constitution should be altered in order to count Aboriginal people as citizens. This amendment was largely a result of Article 12.1 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966*, following 10 years of activism by civil rights campaigners that involved petitions and the lobbying of politicians (Haxton, 2007). Human rights associated with racial tolerance and equality were further emphasised in the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (CERD) (United Nations [UN], 2000). Soon afterwards, Section 9 of the Australian *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* deemed racist acts unlawful (Attorney General’s Department [AGD], 2004).

Despite these changes to policies, Acts and the Australian Constitution that have contributed to create some amelioration of relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, today much of the Aboriginal population (approximately half a million people or 2.4 per cent of the Australian population) continue to battle oppressive attitudes in society and social institutions (FaHCSIA, 2012; Webb & Enstice, 1998). In Western Australian, the Aboriginal population is 2.6 to 5.0 times more likely than the rest of the state’s population to receive racist treatment (Larson, Gillies, Howard & Coffin, 2007). The 12–17-year-old Aboriginal youth category (22 per cent of respondents) reported that at least once in the previous six months they had been refused service (Larson et al., 2007). Larson et al. (2007, p. 329) conclude that what has been largely overlooked is the impact of interpersonal racism as a mechanism by which inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are created and maintained.

Through the Longitudinal Studies of Indigenous Children (LSIC) research, FaHCSIA (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013) reports that across Australia, a high proportion of the 1600
care-givers (86 per cent being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) of Indigenous children surveyed indicated they regularly experience racism. In the 2002–03 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) by the ABS (2003), all 920 Indigenous adults indicated they had recently experienced racism, responding to it in different ways. Of the respondents, 67 per cent indicated they responded with anger, 31 per cent felt sorry for the perpetrator, 28 per cent with sadness, 17 per cent with shame or worry and 12 per cent with a pounding heart or a headache. They reported taking different actions after the experiences; 38 per cent indicated they talked to an acquaintance about it, 33 per cent avoided the person or situation, 30 per cent tried to address the perpetrator, 28 per cent tried to forget about it, 18 per cent kept it to themselves and 9 per cent tried to change the way they are and the things they do (ABS, 2003). Larson et al. (2007) found that 40 per cent of Aboriginal respondents reported being physically or emotionally upset by their experiences with racism.

Representative survey research shows the extent of contemporary racism towards Aboriginal people, in the form of racial stereotypes and prejudices (ABS, 2005; Larson et al., 2007). Gallaher, Ziersch, Baum, Bentley, Palmer, Edmondson and Winslow (2009) conducted a study aimed to explore mental and physical health status and health inequities, experience of urban neighbourhood life, social capital and experience of racism and its impact on health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban Adelaide. They report that racist ideologies and prejudices emerge in daily interactions in Australian society, with 58–79 per cent of the Aboriginal population reporting having personally experienced racism more than occasionally. An Aboriginal mother, Chelsea Bond (2009, p. 175, in Southwell,
Heaton & Fox, 2013), testifies that she regularly experiences racism in public, which she states is largely influenced by media discourse:

When my husband and I venture out with our children into the predominantly white spaces of neighbouring suburbs, we cannot help but notice how people are ‘reading’ us. As Aboriginal parents, we are aware that the public gaze is transfixed on the horrors of physical and sexual abuse and neglect of Indigenous children and families, to the extent that it makes it difficult for some people to see us beyond those depictions. I can attest that the stigma of stereotyping is a heavy burden to shoulder, and is one that we are loath for our children to inherit.

Prejudice and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal people often leads to mistrust of the providers of services (Southwell, Heaton & Fox, 2013). LSIC findings show that relatively low percentages of Aboriginal parents in urban areas trust the general population (47 per cent), police (60 per cent), doctors (84 per cent), hospitals (62 per cent) and schools (79 per cent) (FaHCSIA, 2012). This contributes to them not accessing the services they require, which in turn perpetuates vulnerability and disadvantage (Southwell, Heaton & Fox, 2013)—with the Australian Government acknowledging that Aboriginal people remain the most disadvantaged group in Australia (FaHCSIA, 2013).

Systemic racism, or white privilege, disadvantages Aboriginal people in Australia (Martin-McDonald & McCarthy, 2008). Webb and Enstice (1998) detail the nature and impact of the Northern Territory intervention which continues to apply heavy restrictions and curfews on Aboriginal communities. Systemic racism experienced by Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century in being disallowed access to good land
continues today through the denial of Native Title (land) claims (Langton & Loos, 2009). Systemic inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians are maintained and further perpetuated by what Larson et al. (2007) refer to as interpersonal racism.

Racism also all too often impedes wellbeing (ABS, 2005; Larson et al., 2007; Paradies, Harris & Anderson, 2008). Paradies, Harris and Anderson found experiences of racism towards Aboriginal Australians increases incidents of depression and anger, which can perpetuate poor health. Racism against Aboriginal youths is a large factor in them being two to three times more likely than non-Aboriginal youths to be arrested and charged with an offence, with constant contact with the justice system resulting in high rates of stress, distress and suicide (IIU, 2006). Racism has been found to result in high levels of obesity, smoking and substance misuse among Aboriginal people (Paradies, Harris & Anderson, 2008), and, more so, is an insidious contributor to the life expectancy rate being approximately 16–17 years less than the overall Australian population (AIHW, 2005; IIU, 2006).

The engagement of some Aboriginal people in unhealthy behaviour can further perpetuate racist misconceptions, including that they are welfare dependent, alcoholic and receive special government ‘handouts’ (Mickler, 1998). Mickler recounts that it was soon after the 1967 referendum a new public attitude toward Aboriginal citizens surfaced pertaining to Aboriginal people being ‘privileged’. Fuelled in the 1980s by the ‘Rights for Whites’ and mining lobby TV adverts showing a pair of black hands building a brick wall across a state. Mickler states:
Despite decades of public exposure of the disastrous state of Indigenous poverty and inequality, in the 1990s ideas that Indigenous people are unfairly advantaged in land and welfare, and have powerful allies among the political and professional elite gained ‘popular’ currency. Ideas which became ‘facts’ that served as the ratings-gaining staples for talkback radio programs and the overt and covert pitches of some political parties (1998, p. 12).

Kinnane (2010) concurs, and explains that such social and media discourse has led to Aboriginal people being mythologised as irresponsible, which continues into discourse today—discourse to which children and adolescents are not deaf. Similarly, Gale (2005) explains that myths about Aboriginal people emerge from people’s fear of issues pertaining to native title, reconciliation, and the Government response to the stolen generations in contemporary Australian society.

2.1.2 Contemporary racism and its effect on children and adolescents

Numerous studies detail the contemporary forms or expressions of different forms of racism. Racism can comprise an organised system that labels some ethnic groups as inferior to others, and allocates desirable resources to some members of society while not to others (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 465). Young-Bruehl (1998) states ideologies about the superiority of white people can continue to be prevalent in societies where white people comprise the majority of the population. Murji (2006) elaborates that racist ideology, prejudice and discrimination can be so ingrained in societies it can appear ordinary and even appropriate, with ethnic majority groups often not seeing the adversity experienced by ethnic minorities. Racism can shape a person’s attitudes and behaviours, and can be explicitly justified as a preference of culture or values rather (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 2000). Due to political correctness and social
expectations to be tolerant, Bonnett (2000) explains in an overview of the history of anti-racism initiatives that racism is often implicit rather than expressed openly. Kivel (2002, pp. 13–15), from his perspective of multicultural education and political science in the US, similarly explains that rather than being explicitly demonstrated, racist ideologies and prejudices can often lie unseen, shaping a person’s thoughts, feelings and behaviours, which are experienced by the people they are directed at.

Racial stereotypes, ideologies and prejudices can lead to internalised, systemic and institutional racism. Racism can determine social privileges, particularly of whites in western societies, which protects the social advantage of people who are already advantaged, whilst further disadvantaging those already disadvantaged—particularly in relation to social and economic interests (Sleeter, 1999; Young-Bruehl, 1998). McIntosh (1990), Lawrence and Tatum (1999), and Lee, Menkart and Okazawa-Rey (1998) extend this concept, explaining that race is used to determine advantages and disadvantages in economic terms. McIntosh (1990) lists 26 privileges associated with white privilege—privilege that white people may often not identify—such as being able to rent or buy housing in middle-class areas. NASP (2013) explains racist behaviour (discrimination), including internalised, systemic and institutional racism, stems from racist thinking (ideology and stereotypes) and feelings (prejudices).

Children can be influenced by the racism they observe. Tenorio (2006) reports that from an early age children are not colour blind, but start discriminating against others who are different. Children commence understanding that it is white people who are kings and queens, talk properly and look better, and that the cowboys killed the Indians. These perceptions and behaviours can be learned by children as they engage with children’s storybooks, films and nursery rhymes that promote white people and
demote non-white people (Christensen, 2007). Such texts, Christensen (2007, p. 5) explains, can teach children that white people are the leaders and the heroes, and non-white people are jokers and villains.

Numerous researchers and educators have observed children adhering to stereotypes and demonstrating prejudice. From her intensive research among children in American early learning programs, York (2003) observed three-year-olds exhibiting stereotypes in their speech and prejudices as they interacted with children and adults of a different ethnicity. Similarly, Connolly and Hoskens (2006), during their educational initiatives to develop appreciation for different ethnicities among child-aged students, observed that students not only identified ethnic and cultural differences in other people, but also aversive responses to them. They also report on positive learning outcomes that were attained (elaborated on in Section 4.1). Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) report that three to six-year-olds can segregate ethnic minorities based on appearance; including skin colour, eye shape and accent.

Various studies have focused on racism that white children can learn. These include the projects by Connolly and Hoskens (2006) and Tenorio (2006). Tenorio (2006) reports that white children can often repeat the prejudices and ideologies exhibited around them, and that are often contained in the books they read and the television programs they view. Earlier research conducted by Citron (1969) identified that some white children came to perceive their skin colour as acceptable, and better that others’, and in turn rejected people of darker complexions. Similarly, Mahtani (2001) details how Canadian media influences people’s (from a young age) attitudes and their day-to-day social interactions by the way unbalanced, non-objective, non-impartial and negative representations of minorities are presented on television. From
a Canadian context, Mahtani (2001) explains there is a complex relationship between Canadian media and minorities, and media representations of minorities affect the construction of identities in Canada. Citizens’ attitudes and beliefs, Mahtani explains, are and beliefs are shaped by what the media presents as public knowledge and viewers assume as the same.

As children become older many maintain and extend their racist beliefs and attitudes, although they may learn to hide or disguise these thoughts and feelings in order to meet social expectations (Bonnett, 2000, p. 11). Bonnett (2000) explains that these beliefs and attitudes, even if hidden or disguised, shape a persons’ societal understandings and interactions, and can also be experienced by adult learners (Dirkx, 2011). Kivel (2002, pp. 13–15) elaborates on how racist ideologies may often not be articulated out loud, but silently shape a person’s thoughts and feelings toward other ethnic groups, and influence their interactions with them. Paton (2011) reports that racist ideologies can often surface in students’ language and behaviour, with a total of 30,147 incidents of harassment (of which all bar 561 involved racism) reported by schools as having been demonstrated by students in England and Wales in 2010. He reports that under the 2000 Race Relations Act, around 100 primary school students each day are reported to local authorities after using offensive language in lessons and the playground, including children from as young as four.

A recent survey of more than 4,000 Australian schools conducted by Starke and Marszalek (2012) found that over 20 per cent of students engaged in racist discourse online or at school. Despite the prevalence of racism at Australian schools, not many complaints are received under Commonwealth and State Acts. The website for the New South Wales (NSW) government initiative Race No Way (NSW Government,
2013), which complements the *anti-racism principles of AGD* (2004) and *CERD* (2005), explains is largely due to parents having limited knowledge of legislation, or being uncertain about consequences of reporting incidents and pursuing legal redress.

The NSW Government through its *Racism No Way* initiative states racism is strongly present in Australian schools, evident most commonly through direct forms of abuse, harassment and discrimination. Racism is also manifested indirectly, in the form of prejudiced attitudes, lack of recognition of cultural diversity and culturally biased practices. Most common are name-calling, teasing, exclusion, verbal abuse and bullying, with the harassment mainly coming from other students, with teachers often failing to intervene appropriately, or instigated the harassment by inappropriately dealing with classroom discussions. Brennan (1998, in NSW Government), reports that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in a study said that their children suffered from overt forms of racism, including name calling, teasing, bullying and being provoked into fighting. The parents also believed that teachers discriminated against their children, blaming them for things they hadn't done and punishing them more than non-Indigenous students. Also, racism is often not acknowledged or addressed by teachers or others in authority at school, which fosters a climate in which these actions are seen as normal, entrenching racism (NSW Government, 2013). The *Racism No Way* website reports an anonymous Aboriginal student as stating:

> Not once during my twelve years of formal schooling did any of my teachers or anyone else in the school system affirm my Aboriginality. Instead I grew up feeling ashamed of my Aboriginal heritage and I felt pressured to stress that I was only part Aboriginal (NSW Government, 2013).
Recent increased access and use of the Internet has perpetuated the prevalence of racism among children and adolescents. Starke and Marszalek (2012) report on the way the Internet provides new opportunities for children and youth to engage in bullying and harassment in areas of sexual abuse, gore and racism. They also report that students in more than 500 Australian schools regularly engage in cyber-bullying by posting abusive language and images on Facebook sites dedicated to harassment—such as ‘burn books’ and on ‘goss pages’. Of more than 4,800 students, over 10 per cent reported having developed and contributed to such sites, 15–30 per cent having been bullied at school and around 10 per cent having been cyber-bullied (Starke & Marszalek, 2012). Much of the abusive language and imagery is race-related too, including posts that state ‘nigger’ under a photograph of a student of African descent at a Western Australian school, and a site with pictures of Hitler and references to Nazism created by students at a school in NSW—with such posts and sites attracting large followings. ‘Liking’ such posts constitutes a new form of bullying that had once been limited to the schoolyard (Starke & Marszalek, 2012).

Although learning outcomes associated with students developing an appreciation for other cultures and experiences are included in Australian state and territory curricula and the National Curriculum Framework—including the SACSA (DETE, 2001) and ACARA (2013b) frameworks, schools maintain autonomy over their own curriculum. Implementing anti-racism education in schools remains a challenge, as there are parents and teachers who disagree on whether children can be prejudiced or not (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; York, 2003). Katz (2003), in the context of showing white people the need to understanding, challenging, and confronting issues of racism, explains that there can be indifference from educators and parents, or
even a fear towards students learning about the cultures, knowledge and experiences of other ethnic groups. Young-Bruehl (1998) explains that the majority of teachers in schools in western nations are white, and most deny or are oblivious of race-related prejudices in society.

In an early learning setting, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) elaborate on the opposition they faced when reporting incidents of children discriminating against others, including by segregating children of other ethnicities, to parents, who often respond with disbelief and denial. Donaldson, Lopez and Scribner (2003) detail the resistance they have observed from teachers and school boards when their traditional cultures and curricula are threatened. The NSW Government (2013) report there is angst towards anti-racism educational endeavours.

There are differing views regarding how schools and teachers should interfere in racism that might be exhibited by students at school. In the context of the UK, Paton (2011) supports the position taken by educators and parents in which it is argued that racism should not be taught against or stopped in the playground. Paton argues that children need more freedom to play without having their words reported, as children do not understand the racist language they use and should not be held accountable for their words. Nieto (2005), on the other hand, in a US context, argues that not enough is being done by schools. Nieto (2005) explores what is possible in multicultural education, including what it means, its necessity and its benefits for students of all backgrounds. The ways personal, social, political, cultural, and educational factors affect the success or failure of students at school is elaborated on, and the need to challenge stereotypes. Nieto (2005) explains teachers and schools not celebrating ethnic and cultural diversity sends a message that they do not value diversity, and
that by not stopping racism they support it. By teaching multiculturalism and anti-racism schools can send an alternative message.

2.2 The potential of school-based anti-racism education

The impact of racism on individuals and the wider community as reported by numerous researchers and practitioners suggests that anti-racism education can be of great value. Racism has been reported to stifle aspects of intellectual, social and emotional development. Citron (1969) for example, explains racism prevents people from looking at others through anything other than a limited frame of reference. Greenberg, Weissberg, O’Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik and Elias (2003) also promote a prevention-based approach, designed to see students become knowledgeable, healthy, socially skilled, responsible and contributing citizens. Katz (2003, pp. 11–12) similarly explains that racism prevents people from becoming emotionally healthy and socially responsible individuals, and is dehumanising for both the recipient and the perpetrators. However, Arber (1998) explains that although multicultural practices continue to inform Australian anti-racism educational pedagogy, which are crucial to good community relations, they often fail to achieve their aspirations. This section of the literature review explores what researchers and educators report as effective anti-racism pedagogical practice, including possible resonance between anti-racism education, Aboriginal Studies and the Australian curriculum. This follows a look at the role of critical thinking about racism and injustice, and how to achieve effective outcomes.
2.2.1 Critical thinking and affective outcomes

The use of critical thinking skills in anti-racism education can involve students critiquing the formation of racial identities in texts and the different perspectives regarding national history and contemporary society, leading them to draw their own conclusions about people who are different. Montgomery (2006) explores similar critical engagement with history textbooks in a Canadian school-based context, towards having students imagine a society free of racism. First, Montgomery’s (2006) high school students explore how national history textbooks present national mythologies of Canada as kind, tolerant and less violent nation to all others. There are numerous creative pedagogical approaches—Bailey and Desai (2005), for example use community-based contemporary art to teach diverse experiences to allow students to enquire into incidents in history and culture.

Accordingly, critical thinking can be a useful tool to encourage students to challenge and perhaps change their preconceptions about other ethnic groups. This section reviews the potential offered by critical thinking in anti-racism education. It also examines the role of empathy and the development of other positive emotions in responding to others, including responses of allophilia—a concept that is explored later in this section.

Critical thinking requires and develops open-mindedness to alternative perspectives. Ennis (2002, p. 1) explains that critical thinking involves becoming well informed; judging the credibility of sources; identifying conclusions, reasons, and assumptions; and judging the quality of an argument, including the acceptability of its reasons, assumptions and evidence. It can also involve developing and defending a reasonable position, asking appropriate clarifying questions and drawing conclusions when
warranted (but with caution). Paul and Elder (2008, p. 72) similarly explain that critical thinking comprises recognising the issues, searching for possible solutions, weighing relevant information, distinguishing unstated assumptions and values, appraising evidence, and drawing warranted conclusions.

Different anti-racism educators use different means to have their students think critically about society. Dolby (2000) has students in his social studies classes in South Africa explore the ways in which racial identities are produced as they explore culture, history, politics and the economy. Students in Dolby’s (2000, p. 7) class were encouraged to consider the way people’s responses to different ethnicities were played out in their preferences or ‘taste’ for cultural practices such as music, dance and food, as well as for skin colour, before taking a critical look at racial conflicts and tensions in their local community. Bigelow (2007a) reports on the ways his learners first critically think about race-related injustices before they proceed to think about their own personal worldviews.

Specific to primary and middle school education, in relation to messages broadcasted by social media, Peterson (2007, p. 29) explains how he prompted students to ‘examine the messages that are trying to take over your brain’. Similarly, Christensen (2007) engaged the students in her primary school classroom to critique cartoons and other media in a bid to have them rethink the racist myths they had believed before even starting school. Bigelow (2007a) reports on the opportunities he facilitated for students in his primary school class to learn startling new truths about unethical misconduct by the army in recruiting youth.

Various international studies explore the value of engaging students in critical thinking about their society by having them acknowledge the perspectives in relation
to different ethnic groups. For instance, Zine (2008) reports that new ways of looking at other groups can be learned as the complex and multiple identities of Muslim women are explored. As a Muslim woman herself, Zine (2008, p. 111) explains how Muslim women are ‘the product of historical, political, imperial, and religious inscriptions’, in an industry of media that has historically been dominated by ‘colonial cultural producers’. She explains how they have been misrepresented by journalist and academics—‘experts on our identities’, in a ‘war on terror’ that has resulted in them having been banned from wearing head scarves in public institutions. From a South African educational context that redresses the legacy of apartheid, students in Carrim’s (1998, 2001) classes increased their awareness of the multiplicity within other groups of people. Carrim (1998, p. 301) overviews shifts in the late twentieth century toward assimilation rather than multiculturalism, leading to ‘bad’ multicultural approaches being adopted. He explains that recognising the complex nature of diverse groups assisted students to examine their own presumptions of them, and to understand that not all people from the same group are the same. Carrim (2001) also says that teachers need first to be mindful of their own identity in relation to race, gender, culture, class and other points of difference. Ellwood (2007) similarly reports how critical thinking about society and the social injustices experienced by ethnic minority groups can lead students to consider the diverse perspectives regarding these other groups, and to deconstruct their stereotypical beliefs about them.

There are various educators who report that critical thinking and anti-racism learning outcomes are attained when students take ownership of the direction of the learning experience. Peterson (2007, p. 28) details the way he developed ‘a community of
learners’ among his primary school classes by valuing and incorporating the lives of his students in the classroom discourse. Peterson (2007) explains that what also assists is allowing students to determine the learning experience in the way they share information and opinions among one another. While the teacher oversees the learning experience, classroom discussions provide students with room to talk about what they want to talk about, which largely shapes the learning outcomes achieved (Peterson, 2007).

Critical thinking among students can be about practical, everyday issues that lead them to then explore more complex matters. Wolpert (2006) elaborates on her teaching through which students in her classes critically consider the stereotypes they have heard about other groups of people. Wolpert (2006) reports that by playing the memory game in which they need to match similarities that they identify two different people share they start to think critically about prejudice—including any preconceptions they might hold and perhaps also might start to change.

Wolpert (2006) also reports, and numerous others agree, that critical thinking can comprise or result in various responses of emotion. Katz (2003) elaborates on the adverse responses learners may demonstrate if they become aware of their personal and often subconscious prejudices. Similarly, Christensen (2007) explains that as children have often been emotionally and intellectually shaped by storybooks, films, nursery rhymes and other forms of narratives that portray whites as heroes and non-whites as villains, exploring alternative representations of ethnic others can also be emotional. This current study propositions that as racism comprises thoughts (stereotypes and ideologies) and feelings (prejudiced attitudes), anti-racism learning
and outcomes should comprise alternative, positive emotional responses toward other ethnic groups.

In addition to this, the emotional and psychological wellbeing of students must be ensured before young students share their thoughts and feelings in a critical learning environment (Bigelow, 2007a). Katz (2003) concurs that it is imperative to develop and maintain a safe, non-threatening learning environment before attempting to alter the racist attitudes students subconsciously hold. Bigelow (2007b) similarly contends that by looking after the psychological wellbeing of students, teachers model the way societies can operate in a caring and democratic fashion (Darder, 1997).

Emotion can play an integral role in anti-racism learning (Pelo, 2007). While negative emotions may at first be demonstrated, these can become positive as attitudes toward people who are different are developed. A child’s anti-prejudice learning, Pelo (2007) argues, can commence even before they start school. Pelo (2007) details her pedagogy in which at a basic level, young students begin to consider their own identity as well as that of others. Through role play activities and answering direct questions (e.g. ‘How would you feel if this happened to you?’), numerous students considered the assumptions they had made about the other gender. In the process, students at times felt angry, overwhelmed and stuck as their old beliefs were challenged. This alerted me to what might transpire in my own classrooms. Pelo (2007) elaborates on the way teachers can move young learners beyond these negative feelings and towards feeling increasingly positive, including being appreciative, respectful and considerate towards the other gender.

Empathising with other people can be both a learning process and an outcome (Greenberg et al., 2003; McKown, Gumbiner, Russo & Lipton, 2009). McKown et
al. (2009) explain that children’s ability to regulate their own behaviour, and the competence of their social interactions, resulted in them interpreting social meanings through empathy and to critically consider social problems.

Empathy can help students better understand the impact of white privilege, such as in relation to white students in learning history being presented with only positive representations of what their ancestors accomplished (Leonardo, 2004). Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2004, p. 163) explain empathy is an essential part of ‘normal’ functioning in society. Intercultural empathy is the ability to perceive the world as it is perceived by a culture different from the subject’s own.

Gordon’s (2005) Canadian-based *Roots of Empathy* social and emotional learning (SEL) program found that young learners can develop empathy as they increasingly understand the causes of other people’s emotions. The evidence-based program was developed in 1996, and its objective is to relieve students of pressure from testing, and has been found to reduce anti-social behaviour, including bullying. The program involves a mother and her baby being invited to visit primary school classrooms so students could appreciate what upsets and satisfies an infant. This lead some students to consider what affects the emotions of other people—including their peers, adults and people who they may not even know. Similar SEL experiences in the classroom are reported by Caldarella, Christensen, Kramer and Kronmiller (2009, p. 51) in their evaluation of the *Strong Start* educational program, which has been found to improve students’ ‘peer-related pro-social behaviours’. Research shows that empathy contains cognitive and affective components; these components are elaborated on in relation to the students’ responses to the discourse in Chapter 7. Rogers, Dziobek, Hassenstab, Wolf and Convit (2007) state that empathy is innate, and Jenkins (1991)
explains the same, including in relation to responses that people can have to strangers, and to people of a bygone era.

Rogers et al. (2007) argue that there are two distinct forms of empathy—the cognitive and the affective. While there is no precise definition for these two forms, there is consensus about their distinction (Cox, Uddin, Martino, Castellanos, Milham & Kelly, 2012). Cognitive empathy involves knowing, or trying to know, what other people are thinking or feeling (Hodges & Klein, 2001), and affective empathy involves appropriate emotional responses (Rogers et al., 2007), or empathic concern (Lamm, Batson & Decety, 2007) (elaborated on in Section 7.1). Empathy can be experienced to varying degrees of intensity and levels of appropriateness (Schwartz, 2002), towards the development of moral social positions (King, 2008). King (2008) attributes moral motivation and attitudes as key to empathy—a motivation that is found internal and external of the empathiser. Davis (1983) and Rogers et al. (2007) explain empathy can comprise perspective taking and fantasy—the former involving a tendency to ‘adopt’ another persons’ psychological perspectives, and the latter a propensity to identify with fictional characters—imagining oneself as another person is a sophisticated cognitive process.

In relation to affective expressions of empathy, Hodges and Klein (2001) consider empathy comprises caring for others, desiring to help them, experiencing emotions that match theirs, knowing what they are thinking or feeling, and not distinguishing oneself from another. Rogers et al. (2007) explain this as responding with appropriate emotions to another’s mental state. Affective empathy can be understood as an empathic concern—a sympathy and compassion for others in response to their suffering (Lamm, Batson & Decety, 2007; Minio-Paluello, Lombardo, Chakrabarti,
Wheelwright, Baron-Cohen, 2009; Rogers et al., 2007). It can also be expressed in the form of personal distress—which Batson, Fultz and Schoenrade (1987) explain is an others-oriented response, but which Rogers et al. understands as comprising self-centred feelings of discomfort and anxiety in response to another’s suffering. Batson, Fultz and Schoenrade (1987, p. 19) explain empathic concern as comprising ‘other-focused feelings evoked by perceiving another person in need’, and feeling such responses as sympathetic, compassionate, soft-hearted and warm.

Like Gordon (2005), Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) explore SEL outcomes, and report that the alteration of students’ attitudes toward other people is imperative. The concept of developing responses converse to prejudice in anti-racism education was lightly touched upon by the advocacy of Malcolm X (in Breitman, 1970) who argued for true accounts of historical and contemporary events to be learned about for white people to develop a greater respect for African-Americans. Responses antonymous to prejudice, including affection for groups of people who are different, are concepts explored by Pittinsky, Rosenthal and Montoya (2010). Developing responses among students that are antonymous to prejudice resonates with this current study, as do responses of allophilia, which, as introduced earlier, comprises positive attitudes for groups that are not one’s own. Pittinsky derives allophilia from the ancient Greek words allo and philia or phily for ‘liking’ or ‘love’ and the ‘other’—the ‘other’ comprising foreigners in another country or a group of youth in the neighbourhood (Pittinsky, Rosenthal & Montoya, 2010)—Aboriginal people in the case of this study. Pittinsky, Rosenthal and Montoya (2010, p. 42) outline the Allophilia Scale which attempts to account for positive as well as negative attitudes toward ‘outgroups’—groups that are perceived as different to the perceivers’ own. It
considers negative attitudes, including xenophobia, prejudice, and racism, as well as opposite responses, including affection and kinship towards other groups of people. Allophilia is antonymous to prejudice, and can comprise positive attitudes toward people of other ethnic groups through understanding and engagement, and feeling affection, enthusiasm and comfortable in their presence. Xenophilia is another concept that resonates with this study and with allophilia. It is based on the Greek *xeno* and *philia*—affection or love for unknown or foreign people—which is antonymous with xenophobia, a fear, suspicion or aggression of unknown or foreign people (Bolaffi, 2003, p. 332).

Pittinsky (2009) contends that achieving outcomes of allophilia are a welcome new concept in anti-racism education. He explains that many of teachers have focused on achieving learning objectives associated with multiculturalism but tend to place emphasis on interrupting negative attitudes and actions toward people who are different—including racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination, rather than developing positive attitudes and actions. Pittinsky (2009, p. 213) continues to explain that ‘lukewarm’ responses are often aimed for and sometimes achieved—such as appreciation, acceptance, tolerance and respect. He suggests that positive responses to can be achieved comprise feelings of enthusiasm, comfort, kinship, engagement and affection towards a people group who is different.

This study particularly explores the ways social and emotional learning can be achieved in Aboriginal Studies and through implementing the Australian curriculum.
2.2.2 Anti-racism education, Aboriginal Studies and new curriculum

The history of Aboriginal Studies is largely about the pursuit to increase the understanding of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian students about Aboriginal people and their histories and cultures (Craven, 2011). Craven (2011) also explains it can synonymously comprise the learning objective of stemming racism towards Aboriginal people. The curricula inclusion of Aboriginal Studies in Australian schools was a result of considerable changes to Australia’s state and territory curriculum content (West, 1999). Recommendations made in the Hughes Report (1988) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (commonly referred to as the Aboriginal Education Policy, or AEP) were instrumental in the inclusion. Recommendations from the report led to alterations to educational policy for Aboriginal children by 1990, and the incorporation of Aboriginal Studies in the teaching of all Australian primary and secondary schools in all states and territories.

In 1993, to varying degrees and in different ways, the states and territories made further modifications to their curricula documents to ensure the coverage of Aboriginal histories and cultures. In 1995 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA; now the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood or SCSEEC) extended its support for Aboriginal education, with this support endorsed by the state and territory governments.

Like the other states and territories, SA developed its own curriculum framework (DETE, 2001), incorporating the suggestions of MCEETYA. Similar to other states’ educational policies and syllabi, such as the New South Wales Department of
Education and Training (NSW DET), the SACSA framework identifies the need for all primary and secondary school students to learn about—towards understanding and respecting—Aboriginal people and their past and present histories, cultures and contemporary experiences.

However, despite the advancements in the AEP and by SCSEEC, individual Australian schools and teachers maintain autonomy over what they teach and how they teach it. West (1999) and Craven (2013) state that often teachers may not want or may not feel skilled or capable to teach Aboriginal Studies. Craven (2013) argues that less than one third of a group of 600 teacher education students in Brisbane had met and spoken with an Aboriginal person, and identified their level of knowledge about Aboriginal culture as ‘little’ to ‘some’. Craven (2013) expounds that she found teachers to have often already formed negative opinions about Aboriginal people, often through media reporting. West explains that it is often only taught minimally or not at all due to the feelings of guilt and shame that they or their students may have in response to the historical and contemporary experiences of Aboriginal people. West elaborated that minimal or tokenistic attempts can be counterproductive, as failing to foreground the relevant cultures of Aboriginal people before presenting Dreaming stories to students can perpetuate stereotypes about Aboriginal people. This often occurs when teachers are not aware of or concerned about the racism that Aboriginal people continue to experience—and Racism No Way (NSW Government, 2013) reports that a high proportion of Australians teachers are not aware, concerned or equipped.

Australia’s response to improving the quality of Indigenous education (the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children) and the teaching of all students
about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was largely due to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP, 2006). The UN DRIP (2006) outlines numerous rights of Indigenous people, including in relation to education and self representation. Article 13 of the UN DRIP (2006, p. 7) states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

The UN DRIP (2006, p. 7) also outlines the responsibility of States to protect such rights. Similarly, but more specific to education, Article 14 outlines the right of Indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, including in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. While these rights pertain to Indigenous education (the teaching of Indigenous students) they also lend themselves to the teaching of other members of the population about Indigenous peoples. Article 15 extends Articles 13 and 14 by elaborating on the expected nature and quality of teaching about Aboriginal people stating:

Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information (UN DRIP, 2006, p. 7).

In her text *Teaching Aboriginal Studies*, Craven (2011) argues that all Australian students need to learn how to teach Aboriginal Studies, and appreciate the discrimination and segregation experienced by the Aboriginal population. Pre-service
and practicing teachers must interact with, listen to and learn from Aboriginal people in order to start developing appropriate knowledge, skills, curricula and attitudes to assist them teach Aboriginal Studies sensitively, yet effectively. Aboriginal Studies provides Aboriginal people with a voice, and when schools exclude Aboriginal Studies from their curriculum a strong message is sent that the historical and contemporary worldviews of Aboriginal people are not valued. Craven (2011) also explains that Aboriginal Studies can also involve students learning about past oppression, as well as contemporary sub-standard education, housing, health and employment resulting from low participation in education.

In the last few years, much of the development of Aboriginal Studies curricula has been indirectly captured in the new National Curriculum Framework (ACARA, 2013b). Components of the new curriculum can assist in representing Aboriginal people to students positively, to counteract the way that in Australia ‘certain aspects of Aboriginality are seen negatively and seemingly stereotypically’ (Pedersen & Walker, 2000, p. 190). The cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the middle school component of the National Curriculum Framework aims at enhancing students’ ability to participate positively in the ongoing development of Australia through a deepening knowledge and connection with Aboriginal cultures. Key concepts in the cross-curriculum priority include the examination of the diversity of Aboriginal cultures, ways of life and experiences through historical, social and political lenses—in order for students to better understand Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. An appreciation for the diversity within and across Indigenous communities and societies can also be developed.
Implementing the cross-curriculum priority in the learning area of middle school English studies—the new English Literacy learning strand—is recommended to involve student engagement in ‘understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature’ (ACARA website, 2013a). Students can engage with, and study, literary texts of cultural and social value—including texts that are judged by teachers and schools to expand the scope of their experience. The strand also provides opportunity for students to create their own texts as they learn about human experience. When linked to the cross-curriculum priority, the strand can permit students to reflect on, and better understand the experiences of Aboriginal people, and incorporate this into their development of critical and creative text responses.

Empathy can be part of this understanding of Aboriginal people and their cultures and experiences, too. The cross-curriculum priority, as well as the essential capability of intercultural understanding, complements the English Literacy learning strand. ACARA (2013b) suggests that the development of intercultural understanding should involve increased empathy—which in the context of Aboriginal Studies can involve students empathising with Aboriginal people as they learn about past and present injustices.

These concepts of Aboriginal Studies and the strands, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities of the National Curriculum Framework inform, along with the literature on anti-racism education, the program of learning explored in this study.

The following section explores this study’s potential reverberations with TLT.
2.3 Resonance between anti-racism and transformative learning

The learning of the students in this study was formative, meaning that the anti-racism learning outcomes attained might comprise students not needing to unlearn their racism later in life as adult learners. This differs from TLT, in which students change or transform their perspectives. The two Year 8 classes in this study were to develop new understandings about their society, but after I facilitated this enquiry into their learning experience, and while analysing their responses to and reflections on the program, I identified resemblances with TLT. The components of their learning that resembled TLT, including their perspectives and feelings being disoriented and at times altered, also reflects formative learning experiences among children and adolescents, as elaborated on by Bigelow (2007a), Wolpert (2006) and others (summarised in Section 2.3). However, due to the students’ learning sharing some commonalities with transformative learning, I review the anti-racism educational literature that shaped the lesson content and the way I facilitated the learning experience among the students in my classes (elaborated on in Section 3.1.1) in light of TLT. Accordingly, the structure of this section is intended to start revealing the links between the learning of the students in my classes and TLT.

I identified four key components of TLT as resonating with the students’ learning: critical discourse and critical reflection, disorienting dilemmas, perspective transformation (or alteration) and affective (or emotional) development. The latter two components—perspective alteration and affective or emotional development—is the principle component of the students’ learning examined in this study.
In drawing upon resemblances with TLT, I am aware that adolescents are at earlier stages of moral development than adults, as outlined by Kohlberg (in Walker, 1989). According to Kohlberg, whereas adults are at the third ‘post-conventional’ level, adolescents are largely at the second ‘conventional’ level in their development, at which they support interpersonal accord and conformity, including an adherence to social norms, and maintain the commonly accepted social order. At this point in their development, Kohlberg reasons that they accept social norms, and to a large extent do not question whether they are right or wrong—which in the context of this study can relate to the social injustices experienced by Aboriginal people and the social and media discourses about them that may also have shaped their preconceptions. In this study I explore whether they were able to critically think about the social injustices, and examine adverse attitudes directed towards Aboriginal people. While this critical thinking examination might resonate with the above listed components of TLT, it is only used as a starting point to consider the learning experience of the middle school students.

Permanent, irreversible transformations of perspectives only occurs occasionally among adult learners and is associated with ‘meaning making’ (Courtenay, Merriam & Reeves, 1998, p. 67), and as children and adolescents are still developing physically, and morally—or conventional level of moral development (Colby et al., 1983; Walker, 1989)—their perspectives may well change back after the learning experience. Accordingly, I did not explore whether the students in my classes experienced transformative learning, but whether they experienced some degree of reflection, disorientation and alteration of thoughts and feelings (attitudes) during the program of learning.
The remainder of this section reviews anti-racism educational literature that informed the content and approach of my program that I later realised resembled these TLT components. These components of TLT and anti-racism education are discussed further from Chapter 4 onwards.

2.3.1 An overview of Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning, like anti-racism education and critical pedagogy, emanates from critical theory. Mezirow (1978) coined the term perspective transformation and other concepts associated with the broader concept of transformative learning. Mezirow (1978, p. 100) explains that a perspective transformation, and transformative learning, involves structural changes in the way learners see themselves and their relationships. Building upon the work of Habermas (1971), Mezirow developed TLT as an andragogy for self-directed learning specific to adult educational settings. Cross (1981) explains that whereas children’s growth is associated with personality or ego development, an adult’s development is more related to life cycle-phases, commencing at birth and concluding at death, following a constantly interrupted process of maturation. Adults have experienced the maturation that occurs after childhood and adolescence. Along similar lines, Collard and Law (1989, pp. 100–1) describe adult development that involves a transformation of perspectives as movement along a ‘maturity gradient’. In these stages, it is assumed, adults are not as influenced as adolescents by the messages sent to them by external discourses. Steinberg, Cauffman, Woolard, Graham and Banich (2009) differ. They argue that in some ways, including in relation to making reproductive decisions, adolescents are as mature as adults, and should be treated as
such, but in other ways they are not, and for example should perhaps be exempt from the punishments reserved for the crimes of adults.

Mezirow developed TLT as a framework for guiding learning experiences in which adult learners may break from the tendency of blindly accepting information by critically reflecting on different viewpoints, towards developing new perspectives (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Boyd and Myers (1988, p. 261) describe the end learning outcome of a perspective transformation as comprising understanding dynamics between one’s inner and outer worlds. Mezirow (2000), and also Courtenay, Merriam and Reeves (1998), explain that for learning to be transformative, learners must have the freedom and opportunity to make meaning of their learning experience. Mezirow (2000, p. 198) emphasises that learners must first be given accurate and complete information, as well as different perspectives, before being allowed to weigh and evaluate facts free from coercion. In this process learners’ assumptions are subjected to critical consideration (Mezirow, 2000), which requires the engagement of a mature, adult mind (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007; Mezirow, 2000). It is the perspective of Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) and also Boyd and Myers (1988) that central to TLT is students examining inner emotional and spiritual aspects of their lives, and emotional and spiritual dimensions of learning are underdeveloped and require further exploration. Mezirow (in Illeris, 2009, pp. 92–3) outlines transformative learning as comprising:

1. a disorienting dilemma;
2. self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame;
3. a critical assessment of assumptions;
4. recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
5. exploration of options for new roles, relationships and action;
6. planning a course of action;
7. acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans;
8. trying new roles provisionally;
9. building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and
10. a re-integration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective.

Numerous educators have drawn upon and also built on these 10 points, including Bennetts (2003) in his research on the impact of transformative learning not only on individuals but and UK communities. King (2011, p. 92) simplifies and adds value to these points, by categorising points 1 and 2 as involving fear and uncertainty, 3, 4 and 5 as testing and exploring, 6, 7, 8 and 9 as affirming and connecting, and 10 as new perspectives. To explore some resemblance between TLT and the learning experience of the students in this study, the components of TLT that I draw upon are Mezirow’s (in Illeris, 2009) disorienting dilemmas, and King’s (2011) engaging in testing and exploring (which encompasses concepts of critical discourse and critical reflection) and adopting new perspectives. I also draw on another component of TLT—the role and function of emotion, as elaborated on by transformative learning theorists and practitioners Dirkx (2000), Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007), Boyd and Myers (1988) and Boyd (1991). Accordingly, the four key components used to frame this section and later discussion chapters are:
1. disorienting dilemmas
2. analysis and critical reflection
3. perspective transformation
4. affective or emotional development.

2.3.2 Disorienting dilemmas

For learning to be transformative, a disorienting dilemma must initially be experienced (Mezirow, 2000). Disorientation is triggered when learners are confronted with startling new realities that challenge their former perspectives (Johansson & Knight-McKenna, 2010), which lead them to a ‘crossroad’, or ‘pedagogical entry point’ (Lange, 2004, p. 7). Lange (2004, p. 138) explored transformative learning for revitalizing citizen action, and concludes it as an ontological process where participants experienced a change in their being in the world.

Mezirow (2000) and Taylor (1998) explain that at such points learners determine whether they will seek and adopt new perspectives, or cling to old, familiar and often faulty understandings. They both elaborate on the way a person’s understandings of themselves and their world can be unsettled—or disoriented—internal or external to formalised learning settings as they experience joy (including upon the birth of a child or a marriage) and sorrow (including when faced with a death or a divorce).

There are numerous learning moments in which disorienting dilemmas may be experienced by learners, including through engagement in poetry (Cranton, 2004; Dirkx, 2000), drama (Cranton, 2004), film (Karavoltsou, 2011) and numerous other creative expressions (Hoggan, Simpson, & Stuckey, 2009). Hoggan, Simpson and
Stuckey (2009) detail the value of imagination, kinesthetic knowing, intuition, spirituality and emotion in the adult learning process. In anti-racism educational contexts, adult educators report their observations of how learners can have their prior perspectives toward other groups disoriented, including through learning about diverse groups of people (Finnegan, 2011). Wong, Mondo, Sharpe, Tiu-Wu, Watson and Williams (2011) also explain that disorientation can be experienced by learners being amazed at and connected with their cultures and experiences. Fourcade, Krichewsky and Sumputh (2010) elaborate on how adult learners became conscious of the oppressive experiences of another group of people, which disoriented their prejudices. Wong et al. (2011) explain that developing moral indignation towards social injustices can comprise a disorienting dilemma that moves learners to experience transformative learning.

School-based research and practice has identified that child and adolescent students can experience learning moments that may in some ways resemble disorienting dilemmas. According to Bank (2008), school-based anti-racism initiatives can challenge students and unsettle their racial prejudices toward diverse people and their apathy towards social inequities. Inada (2007) similarly engaged her 12-year-old students in critical learning processes as they responded to poetry, *Rayford’s Song*, that first unsettled their understandings of society and the different people in it. In the context of TLT, experiencing a disorienting dilemma can result in learners engaging in critical discourse and critical reflection.

2.3.3 Critical discourse and critical reflection

TLT involves learners’ authentic engagement in critical discourse, which Mezirow (1997) theorises results in learners’ having their consciousness increased. Mezirow

It is contested whether critical discourse is cognitive, affective or both; in a debate between Mezirow and Dirkx (in Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006, pp. 123–4), Mezirow explains that rational processes are pivotal, whereas Dirkx emphasises the importance of the affective ‘inner work’ of learners (as does Boyd [1991] in relation to learning in small groups). Regardless of Mezirow’s emphasis on the cognitive and Dirkx’s on the affective, engagement in critical discourse involves learners progressively developing new ways of knowing, ‘inclusive, differentiating, permeable (open to other viewpoints), critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change and integrative of experience’ (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19).

The cognitive and affective processes required to transform acquired ways of knowing requires learners to engage in not only critical discourse but also critical reflection (Mezirow, in Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006). Mezirow (1981) explains that for discourse to lead to a perspective transformation it is necessary for learners to critically reflect on their assumptions, beliefs, feelings and values. Drawing upon
the work of Habermas (1971), he argues that the least familiar of the three areas or domains, the emancipatory, is of particular interest to adult educator. Transformative learning is prompted by students’ independent critical reflection on critical events (Franz, 2003) and critical reflection on assumptions (Franz, 2007). In the context of studying the interconnections between women’s attitudes toward reading and their personal and family relationship, and how reading shapes their desires, aspirations and identity formation, Javis (2003) states that the depth of a learner’s engagement in critical discourse can often be determined by a willingness to critically reflect on former understandings (Jarvis, 2003), and the depth determining the result of learners engaging in ‘meaning making’, or making better sense of their world (Berger, 2004, p. 336). More so, Kilgore and Bloom (2002) and also Glisczinski (2007) identify critical reflection (or premise reflection) as the most significant aspect of the adult learning experience. Kilgore and Bloom (2002) found in their experience that learners do not always experience transformative learning. Glisczinski (2007) found that 35 per cent of college students report experiencing transformative learning following engaging in critical reflection and experiencing disorienting experiences.

Liimatainen, Poskiparta, Karhila and Sjogren (2001), in their study of nurse students’ reflective learning, state that critical reflection assists learners make sense of the disorienting dilemmas they experience as they continue weighing new information against old. Imel (1998) explains that by critically reflecting on personal experiences, learners may reconsider and at times change their meaning schemes—including their beliefs and attitudes. According to Imel (1998), it is imperative learners develop autonomous thinking and understand the meaning of their experiences, and to make their own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and
feelings of others. Such learning requires direct and honest self-analysis and self-regulation, and mature cognitive participation in the learning experience (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartne, 2007).

Some elements of critical discourse and critical reflection as conceptualised in TLT can be seen in children’s and adolescents’ engagement in critical thinking and reflection in classroom settings. Bigelow (2007a, pp. 85-86) elaborates on the discourse with which he engaged the primary school students in his classroom in America, involving them considering and weighing information about social inequality and discrimination. He also reports (in Bigelow & Peterson, 2006, p. 116) that his middle school students developed a democratic capacity to think critically about historical and contemporary injustices experienced by Mexicans. The adolescent students engaged in reflective thinking about the mass murder of Mexicans by Americans and the theft of the good northern land of Mexico (which became the southern states of America). Students critically analysed historical accounts in school textbooks and films justifying the actions of Americans and the stereotypical depictions of Mexicans—including as illegal immigrants in the southern states. Peterson (2007, p. 29) similarly found interrupting primary school students’ understandings readily occurred when they are challenged to ‘examine the messages that are trying to take over your brain’. Peterson (2007, p. 88) reports the primary school students in his classes deeply explored manipulative United States (US) army recruitment strategies for signing up youth, which in turn increased their awareness of the issues involved.

Children and adolescents can engage in critical thinking by first exploring less complex issues in discourses in social studies, albeit at a more basic level than adults
engaging in critical discourse and reflection in transformative learning contexts. Cloues (2006) started engaging her 10 and 11-year-old students in her Year 5 class in critical thinking in learning about worms. She explains that the children had at first been reluctant to touch or even look at the worms, but gradually learnt to respect their role as they considered the excessive human waste they decompose ‘for us’, leading them to critically consider the impact of humans on the environment. The critical discourse Fleischman (2006), Dean (2007) and Pelo (2007) engaged their students in centred on creative and imaginative thinking, which like the practice of Cloues (2006), commenced with engaging in lightweight and enjoyable subject matter. Fleischman’s (2008, p. 56) primary school students first read the poem *Honeybees* to reflect on the worker bee’s complaint ‘being a bee is a pain’ and the queen bee’s exclamation ‘being a bee is a joy!’. From this the students relayed these different perspectives and experiences to those of disadvantaged and advantaged ethnic groups in society. Pelo (2007) elaborates on the way children in the early years engaged in a level of critical thinking, including those stemming from role play activities; despite some students at first feeling angry, overwhelmed, stuck, confused, trapped and scared when faced with unsettling information.

The next section explores how children might then proceed to alter some of their perspectives.

2.3.4 **Perspective transformations (or alterations)**

The overarching objective of facilitating transformative learning—which indeed often first involves learners engaging in critical discourse and critical reflection and experiencing disorienting dilemmas, is for perspectives to be transformed (Lyon, 2001; Mezirow, 1994), which Mezirow (1994) explains requires learners to make
some decisions in relation to what to believe on their own accord. Lyon (2001) reports that the women in her study experienced a number of disorienting or trigger events as they experienced culture shock, cultural adjustments, and re-entry into the home country.

Kegan (2000, p. 47) explains that perspective transformations involve epistemological changes to the way learners think about personal life events. Jarvis (2011) and Koulaouzides (2011) understand perspective transformations as a gradual disjuncture between their old and new understandings or perceptions. Mezirow (2000) states perspective transformations occur infrequently; which he states involves learners becoming aware of their assumptions, and how their assumptions limit the way they distinguish, comprehend and feel about their world. Such shifts have been observed in learning about educational leadership (Shields, 2010) and caring for the environment (O’Sullivan, Morrell & O’Connor, 2002). O’Sullivan, Morrell and O’Connor (2002) explain students can undergo profound structural shifts in their thoughts, feelings, and actions that dramatically and permanently alter their way of being in the world—including in relation to understanding themselves, power relations pertaining to class, race and gender, and potential social justice.

Human action is a transformative learning outcome that adds to a learner’s perspective transformation. Mezirow (1994) presents the concept of human action and distinguishes it from social and political action as a more personal transformation in relation to a learner’s interactions with other people, such as caring for another person (see also Hoggan, 2010). Newman (1993) however argues that human action is no different to a perspective transformation, and not worth separate emphasis. Newman (1993) contends learners cannot experience a transformation of
perspectives without also exhibiting outcomes associated with human action. A side exploration in this study involves whether the students in my classes developed and demonstrated a desire to engage in human action in relation to stopping social injustice—and racism in particular.

Although this study does not claim that the adolescent students in my class experienced transformative learning, and in particular a perspective transformation (as TLT is reserved for the learning of adults due to requirements of maturity), it does explore whether they achieved some alteration of their thoughts and feelings, and whether their entire learning process assisted in these alterations. School students have been found to alter their thoughts in relation to small, easy to understand objects (Cloues, 2006), and also to big, convoluted topics (Bigelow, 2007a; Bigelow & Diamond, 2006). The students in Cloues’ (2006) class reflected on the way they started to respect worms and care for them as they critically considered abuse of the environment by humans and learnt about how worms turn waste into valuable compost. In other learning settings, Cloues (2006) found adolescent students thought critically about race-related social injustice as they learned about race-related contributions to society by people of diverse cultures and ethnicities. Bigelow (Bigelow, 2007a; Bigelow & Diamond, 2006) report on the way the students in his class altered their perspectives toward the media as they learnt about the way it had been influencing their worldviews. Bigelow and Diamond (2006) detail the way students developed new perspectives regarding diverse groups of people as they critically reflected on national history and political discourse, and particularly the adverse effect of authoritarian power on the powerless. Peterson (2007, p. 28) observed primary school students taking ownership of their personal learning
experience and changing their personal worldviews. Peterson’s (2007, p. 28) ‘community of learners’ among his primary school classes accomplished such ownership from students by having them value elements of their lives and including them in their classroom discourse, as they responded with sympathy to the social injustices they learnt about. In his teaching, in which students became aware of social injustices relating to the bombing of Osaka, Au (2006) reports students acknowledged the oppression some people in Japan experienced as they altered their thoughts and also feelings toward these people—which can comprise affective or emotional development, as explored in the following section.

### 2.3.5 Affective of emotional development (or alteration)

There has been significantly greater reporting on the cognitive and objective components and nature of TLT than the affective. Mezirow (2000) for instance places emphasis on the role of the cognitive and the rational, although he does concede emotional development (and maturation) plays a role in the transformation of learners’ perspectives and the enhancement of their relationships. However, beyond briefly mentioning the presence of ‘emotional maturity, awareness, empathy, and control ... knowing and managing one’s emotions, motivating oneself, recognising emotions in others and handling relationships, as well as clear thinking’ (2000, p. 11) he does not elaborate on the role and function of emotion.

There are some theorists, however, who place a strong emphasis on the role of learners’ affective engagement. Affective learning is often integral to learners’ critical, reflective engagement in transformative learning experiences (Taylor, 2000). Cranton (in Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006) details the debate between Mezirow and Dirkx; unlike Mezirow, Dirkx emphasises the need for change to the learner’s
whole—or holistic—self. Dirkx (2006, pp. 124) describes this as ‘soul-work’, comprising the modification of a learner’s inner identity and subjectivity. In later work, Dirkx (2011) explores how learners’ emotional responses can be analysed to ascertain the holistic nature of their learning experiences, including any transformation of their ‘shadow’ dispositions which he describes as inner, ‘undesirable’ thoughts and feelings. Along similar lines, and as explained in Section 2.3.4, O’Sullivan, Morrell and O’Connor (2002) report transformative learning can involve participants experiencing a structural shift of not only their thoughts but also their feelings. Goldie, Schwartz and Morrison (2005, p. 427) examined medical students’ attitudes and potential behaviour towards informing a 12-year-old patient of her terminal prognosis in a situation in which her parents do not wish her to be told, towards achieving ‘meaningful understanding’. In this, Goldie, Schwartz and Morrison (2005) report that the students’ emotional engagement as inseparable to the transformation of their perspectives on ethical issues associated with informing leukaemia patients of their condition. Yorks and Kasl (2002) also contend transformative learning must be holistic—fully engaging a learner’s whole self in context to their social surround, and identify that more research is required to understand the role of the affective. Yorks and Kasl (2002) explain, however, that the role of affect in education is still largely unknown and under-theorised.

Transformative learning can involve learners changing their feelings toward other people of different ethnicities (Fourcade, Krichewsky & Sumputh, 2010; Magos, 2010). Learners have been observed to respond in expressions of empathy with ethnic minority groups after interacting with them and learning about the social injustices they have faced (Johnson-Bailey, Smith & Guy, 2011, p. 646). Agarwal
(2011, p. 547) found Hindu Nyayapathnk learners in her classroom became concerned about how Muslim Nyayapathnk learners felt amidst the various oppressive circumstances they faced. The two Indian religious groups held different worldviews, but as the Hindu Nyayapathnk learners found commonalities between their own and the cultures and experiences of the Muslim Nyayapathnk learners they increasingly empathised with the social injustices they had experienced. This involved the former feeling comfortable learning about and interacting with the latter—a response of allophilia (Pittinsky, 2009). Wong et al. (2011) similarly found adult learners increasingly felt comfortable when learning about or being in the company of people of other ethnicities.

However, some transformative learning practitioners report feeling uncomfortable is a more beneficial response towards experiencing a perspective transformation, including Johansson and Knight-McKenna (2010) in relation to their adult learners engaging in economic and leadership studies. They explain comfort brings complacency, whereas discomfort can be synonymous to disorienting dilemmas, which can lead to a perspective transformation.

Anti-racism education in primary and middle school classrooms can assist children and adolescents alter their thoughts and feelings toward people who are ethnically different to them. In the context of her classroom, Christensen (2007, p. 9) argues the education of white children can address the way many have been emotionally and intellectually shaped by industrially produced fiction in television programs, movies, magazines and comic books that cast white people as superior to non-white people. In response to such ideological messages, Carrim (2001) found that when children analyse the plurality of identities within different groups of people, and even within
an individual’s persona, they may more readily alter their attitudes toward different personalities, preferences and practices. In his middle school classroom, Dolby (2000) challenged students to think about the way they felt towards other ethnic groups in considering the way their personal preferences in music, dress and other social identifiers may comprise racist ideologies. The students were challenged to consider if their dislike for another person was based on such social identifiers, or on their feelings toward the other’s skin colour, accent and culture—that is, if social identifiers were an excuse to be racist towards other ethnic groups.

Perhaps in some ways like adults in transformative learning experiences (Agarwal, 2011; Johnson-Bailey, Smith & Guy, 2011), primary school students may respond with empathy as they consider the impact of racism on the recipient. Bigelow and Christensen (2006, p. 127) state the development of empathy among young students in anti-racism education is invaluable, and ‘one of the most important aims of teaching’. Bigelow and Christensen (2006, p. 127) explain children grow up in a world that ‘pits people against each other, offers vastly greater or lesser amounts of privileges based on who they were born as, and rewards exploitation with wealth and power’, which does not make it easy to facilitate learning in which they engage empathetically with people of diverse ethnicities. Bigelow and Christensen (2006) guide students to engage in an interior monologue through which they critically weigh social issues to imagine the thoughts and feelings of victims of injustice, and to write creative stories from that person’s perspective. Teachers can sensitively and to good effect guide students to reflect on societal issues they increasingly feel moral indignation about, or even anger towards, and reflect on other productive ways they can respond to these issues (Salas, 2007, pp. 43–44). By looking after students’
psychological wellbeing, teachers model to their classes how society can operate empathetically and democratically (Salas, 2007). Bigelow (2007b) likewise expounds that the emotional and psychological wellbeing of children in his classroom is imperative for them to develop their critical thinking skills.

Many of these anti-racism educational processes and outcomes shaped the designing, facilitation and analysis of the learning experience of the students in my classes, and are further elaborated in Chapter 3.

2.4 Summary

There is potential for Australian education to accommodate anti-racism learning processes and outcomes with the objective of altering students’ views of, and feelings toward, the Aboriginal population. So too is there great need. This chapter has reviewed literature that reports that, even from a very young age, children can be influenced by social and media discourse. They can learn race-related attitudes and adopt them as their own, and can learn to hide them from the public eye. In addition, the increasingly popularity and use of the Internet, and particularly social media, has led to the increase of incidents of racism. While some parents, teachers and schools may oppose anti-racism education (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001), Australian state and territory, and now the National Curriculum Framework, endorse the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures across the curriculum, and the development of intercultural understandings—including empathy. However, schools and teachers have autonomy, and may not provide for such learning experiences among their students. From the anti-racism (but not the TLT) literature reviewed in this chapter I designed the program of learning that is explored in this
study, curious to know if the middle school students might hold preconceptions of Aboriginal people, and more so if they might engage in the program and challenge and change any negative views they might hold.
Chapter 3  The research methodology
Drawing upon the anti-racism educational and Aboriginal Studies literature reviewed in Section 2.2.2, I designed an educational program for the students in two of my Year 8 English classes—Class A in 2009 and Class B in 2010. My aim was to explore ways middle school education may assist students to better understand Aboriginal people and their cultures and experiences. Specifically, I sought to find:

*If middle school students’ engagement with an anti-racism learning program will alter their cognitive and affective responses toward Aboriginal Australians?*

In this investigation, I too am a learner, critically reflecting on my own practice and the responses of the students in the program, progressively comparing their learning to the literature.

In this chapter, I outline the methodology that resembled some aspects or principles of action research that I followed to prepare and facilitate the program of learning, and collect and analyse the students’ responses, which reflected aspects of action research. I outline the structure and the content of the program, and the written tasks, including for assessment, that students produced, which provided me with insight about their cognitive and affective responses to their learning—particularly about Aboriginal people. I detail the aspects of action research that are incorporated in this study for providing voice to students in relation to their reflections on their learning. The chapter also details my deliberations on facets of the learning environment and provisions of opportunities for students to respond independently, reflectively, critically and creatively to the program, as well as a variety of ethical considerations for research involving children. These deliberations and considerations continue to inform the discussions and reflections throughout Chapters 4–8, before Chapter 9
provides suggestions for teachers, as well as researchers, to continue to investigate the value of anti-racism education in middle schools. It draws upon some aspects of action research, which are elaborated on in this chapter.

3.1 Preparing and facilitating a program of learning

It was not the initial intention of this study to develop a new program of learning, but a new program became inevitable due to the nature of this enquiry. Based on curriculum provisions set out in the SACSA framework by DETE (2001)—the curriculum authority in SA where this study was held—this study explores how a students’ middle schooling can involve learning about past and present cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people. The specific, overarching objective was to see if such learning could have students challenge and perhaps change any negative preconceptions of Aboriginal people they might have—as an effective anti-racism strategy. To contextualise the study further, the learning occurred in the subject area of English, which shaped the range of texts the students engaged with, and the critical and creative literary responses they produced. As detailed in Section 2.2, these teaching approaches and learning responses resonate with components of the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, general capabilities, and the English Literacy learning strand in the Australian curriculum, released in 2011, half way through this study.

Existing educational and research initiatives did not accommodate these contextual considerations. Rather, I developed the program of learning explored in this study. To do this, I consulted Aboriginal elders and educators (elaborated on in Section 3.1) and reviewed a myriad anti-racism educational literature and Aboriginal Studies
literature (see Section 2.2.2). The intention was to enhance students’ social consciousness of the past and present oppression experienced by Aboriginal people, and to have them consider Aboriginal people in light of their responses to these social experiences in new ways—perhaps in more positive ways. This process resembles aspects of what Kemmis and Taggart (2005) describe as the spiral of self-reflective cycles of:

- Planning a change.
- Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change.
- Reflecting on these processes and consequences and then replanning.
- Acting and observing.
- Reflecting.

And so on …’ (Kemmis & Taggart, 2005, p. 5).

Similarly, Lewin (1958) described action research as comprising three cyclical steps, comprising planning actions, before engaging in the action or learning, and then obtaining output or results. In a like vein, I undertook a process of planning the program, facilitating it, collecting the students’ responses for analysis and reflecting on their engagement in 2009, before determining any changes to be made for Class B in 2010 in light of these new understandings. I thematically analysed all students’ responses to and reflections on the program to gain a full understanding of the students’ learning journey.

The program was guided by some middle school key ideas outlined in the SACSA framework under the subject area Society and Environment and the strand time, continuity and change (DETE, 2001, p. 300):
Appraising and presenting various historical and possible future perspectives on a particular cultural issue, justifying a personal opinion, and showing empathy for, and appreciation of, other cultures; and

Exploring why they should leave their opinions open to change—by hypothesising about the influence of the past; differentiating between historical facts and historical interpretations; interpreting motives and actions from different perspectives, including those associated with power; and recognising that source material is influenced by the standpoints of witnesses and writers.

The achievement of these two key ideas can be observed in how a student:

Analyses and communicates how personal histories can be linked with particular events and/or broader social events (eg. work opportunities, moving to another city, migration to Australia, wars, interaction with natural environments) (DETE, 2001, p. 300).

A number of middle school standards were also drawn upon from the strand societies and culture from the SACSA society and environment framework (DETE, 2001).

These strands include:

Analysing the reasons for, and effects of, racism, prejudice, discrimination and conflict between and within socio-economic, cultural, gender, ability or age groups; and asking who benefits and who suffers. Students identify and practise respectful ways of countering negative and oppressive behaviours (DETE, 2001, p. 314).

Critically analyses information for accuracy, relevance, reliability, bias, gaps, racism and paternalism (DETE, 2001, p. 315).
Analysing a contemporary cultural or social issue in the media from a range of perspectives, and then justifying a considered personal ethical viewpoint, against critical opposition (DETE, 2001, p. 316).

These fall underneath the societies and culture key idea:

Students analyse situations and act responsibly to enhance the democratic and human rights of individuals and groups, and to counter prejudice, racism, harassment or oppression (DETE, 2001, p. 316).

From these learning outcomes suggested by DETE (2001), and the educational literature reviewed in Chapter 2, I determined my teaching approaches and developed the content of the program. To sensitively, respectfully and accurately represent Aboriginal people, I referred to and incorporated into the program Aboriginal Studies resources such as that produced by Craven (2011) and reviewed in Section 2.2.2, and drew upon the advice of two Aboriginal elders and educators. I determined content for 16 lessons spanning four units that would introduce students to some past and present cultures, experiences and achievements of Aboriginal people that might begin to challenge any existing preconceptions. Based on the SACSA learning outcomes (DETE, 2001), Aboriginal Studies resources, anti-racism pedagogical literature and advice of the Aboriginal elders and educators, the program was designed and facilitated to:

- challenge the students’ previous understandings about Australian society
- increase students’ recognition of social privilege enjoyed by many Australians (especially white Australians) but often denied to Aboriginal Australians
- extend students’ understanding of the impact of racism on the recipient
• enlarge students’ awareness of, and appreciation for, past and present Aboriginal cultures and achievements

• provide students with opportunities to form a new vision for better social outcomes for Aboriginal people, and argue for equality and justice

• facilitate opportunity for students to empathise and see Aboriginal people differently.

3.1.1 The program

The students in my classes engaged in four units over 16 lessons, which aimed to have them celebrate Aboriginal cultures, commiserate with past and present-day injustices, and celebrate contemporary achievements (details of the four units are in Section 3.1.1). The dates, descriptions, themes and resources (or literature-base) of each lesson are outlined in Table 3.1. For example, Lesson 1, taught on 3 August 2009 with Class A and 9 May 2010 with Class B, first involved the students completing Surveys 1 and 2, then reflecting on their responses (elaborated on in Section 3.2.2), before viewing and responding to photographs of Aboriginal children engaging in various cultural practices. Table 3.1 also shows the type of response students produced in each lesson, and the traits each lesson was designed to assist students to perceive. Thus, Lesson 1 involved students starting their narrative and reflecting on what they were learning, which might include perceiving Aboriginal people as responsible, fun-loving and advanced.
Table 3.1  The program of learning

Note: L = lesson; CA = Class A; CB = Class B; DEST = Department of Education, Science and Technology; RPF = Rabbit-Proof Fence; NAIDOC = National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>CB: 10/5/10</td>
<td>Photographs of Aboriginal children and traditional culture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CB: 11/5/10</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CA: 5/8/09</td>
<td>Filling in worksheet with words for places and artefacts (excursion)</td>
<td>Narrative Poetry Reflections</td>
<td>Diversity Celebration</td>
<td>Craven (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CB: 12/5/10</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>CB: 12/5/10</td>
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<td>Empathy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Injustice</td>
<td>CB: 12/5/10</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CB: 13/5/10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unit</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Dates</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CA: 12/8/09, CB: 19/5/10</td>
<td>Listening to Tanya: stories of racism</td>
<td>Narrative Poetry Reflections</td>
<td>Oppression Empathy</td>
<td>Tamia, African-Australian</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>CA: 13/8/09, CB: 20/5/10</td>
<td>Learning about racist myths and their effect</td>
<td>Poetry Reflections</td>
<td>Diversity Whiteness</td>
<td>Craven (2011)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>CA: 21/8/09, CB: 28/5/10</td>
<td>Visiting elder: Stef talking about her culture</td>
<td>Exposition Poetry Reflections</td>
<td>Diversity Celebration Empathy</td>
<td>Stef, Aboriginal elder</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
From the beginning of the program the students had opportunities to consider their race-related thoughts and feelings and examine what might be stereotypes and prejudices. Lee (2006), Katz (2003) and Clarke (1995) suggest that learning about racism can be challenging for students, but as Lee (2006) and Pelo (2007) point out, the important thing is how students navigate the learning experience. Like Zine’s (2008) study (elaborated on in Section 2.2.1), the program informed them about the complex, multiple and mutable identities within and across any group of people.

To reduce possible boredom and a lack of engagement from students, the program moved from one lesson to the next in quick succession. Several different guests, materials and learning environments were provided to capture and maintain students’ engagement, and accordingly three lessons (Lessons 3-5) were held out of doors on an excursion to the local reserve. Due to the depth of Aboriginal Studies material and anti-racism pedagogical literature reviewed, and the limited number of lessons that I could allocate to the program, I had to strategically select my material. For homework students were asked to consolidate and incorporate their new learning in their narratives and expositions. Many wrote these from what they perceived might be the perspective of an Aboriginal person engaging in the cultural practices and experiencing the injustices presented in class. As mentioned in Section 2.2.2, empathy can help students better understand the impact of whiteness and racism (Leonardo, 2004).

Empathy is an essential part of ‘normal’ functioning in society (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004, p. 163), and involves connecting cognitively and affectively with the circumstances of other people. This section of Chapter 3 also elaborates on
the general consensus among philosophers that empathy can be divided into cognitive and affective forms.

Lesson plans (see Appendix 1 for the plans for Lessons 6 and 8) provided further details about the aims, dates, length of lessons, resources, activities, structure, timing, lesson content, teaching approach and considerations for the learning environment of all 16 lessons. For instance, Lesson 6 involved the students viewing the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, which depicts the events before, during and after three ‘half-caste’ (of Indigenous and non-Indigenous descent) girls were taken from their mother and community. The lesson plan (and all 16 lesson plans) identifies the anti-racism literature drawn upon and reviewed in Chapter 2, the (135-minute) triple lesson was based on, and outlines the aim of the lesson. The literature includes information about the intention, and to some degree the effect, of the policy of assimilating and deculturalising Aboriginal people (Bandler & Fox, 1983), and the impact of ideological assumptions of biological inferiority of some ethnic groups (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 2000, pp. 15–16). Associated worksheets (described in less academic terms for the students) provided opportunity for students to indicate what they thought and felt about what they were learning. Students were then invited to draw upon these reflections to recall their feelings for incorporation in their narrative writing—student voice being given central emphasis in action research (Richardson, 2001).

Lesson 8 and its accompanying worksheet involved students learning about present-day life outcomes experienced by Aboriginal people as reported by the ABS (2012). The students were asked questions that required them to think critically about the way racism might impede educational and other outcomes. The content of Lesson 8
was extracted from concepts pertaining to intergenerational transmission of race-related disadvantage, in which children of parents who are denied resources and opportunities for good health and wellbeing are born into, and live through, disadvantage (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). I taught the students in this study about the ways racism can further disadvantage the already disadvantaged, which can assist in protecting the social and economic interests of the advantaged (Young-Bruehl, 1998).

3.1.2 An overview of each lesson in the program

To achieve the overarching objective of having students change negative preconceptions about Aboriginal people, the program was designed to engage them in a chronological, empathetic learning journey. The intention of the program was to have them celebrate past and present cultures and achievements of Aboriginal people, and sympathise with past and present social injustices and inequalities. The value of celebrating the diverse cultures and achievements of different ethnic groups—including the diversity within the other group—is emphasised by numerous anti-prejudice education theorists and practitioners, including Craven (2011), Carrim (2001), Humphries (2000) and Lee (2006) (reviewed in Section 2.2). Humphries (2000, p. 280) explores how ‘communities of learning’ can engage in discourse that disrupts notions of ‘dialogue’, ‘community’ and ‘difference’.

Appreciation of Aboriginal cultures was a theme in Lessons 1–4 (Unit 1), and in Lessons 12–16 (Unit 4). Unit 2 (past social injustices) and Unit 3 (present social injustices) emphasised the topic of whiteness and white privilege, including concepts presented by Leonard (2004) of students learning about the impact of racism. I hoped
the students might recognise that these disadvantages are foreign to their own personal experiences, and that they would question why this is so.

**Unit 1 (Lessons 1–4): Aboriginal cultures**

The four lessons in Unit 1 presented components of Aboriginal cultures and communities. The unit was designed to develop a sensitivity and appreciation among students of Aboriginal cultures (DETE, 2001). Lee (2006) states that the celebration of cultural diversity is a significant component of anti-racism educational initiatives—appreciating diversity can dissolve prejudices. Accordingly, in Lesson 1 (after completing Surveys 1 and 2) students viewed photographs of Aboriginal children to identify the cultural skills they were engaging in, including building huts, dancing and playing games (Department of Education, Science and Technology [DEST], 2005). They then viewed the short documentary *Soundtracks* (2004) in Lesson 2, throughout which they wrote sentences to detail the hunting, gathering and culinary practices and community responsibilities they observed. The next two lessons, facilitated at the local park, involved learning about weapons, utensils and other Aboriginal technologies and also clothing (Lesson 3). It also involved them engaging in a small party that involved sharing food and drink brought from home, which they recognised is like celebrations they themselves engaged in and which they were informed resembles the general concept of shared meals in Aboriginal communities. In Lesson 4 they then enjoyed playing a number of Aboriginal children’s games in order that they may also see the similarities between the games that Aboriginal people play and those that they themselves play, before the program changed focus with Unit 2.
Unit 2 (Lessons 5–7): Historical injustices

The three lessons comprising Unit 2 introduced students to some components of Australian history in relation to the discrimination and segregation experienced by Aboriginal people, as suggested by Craven (2011) (reviewed in Chapter 2). As provided for in the SACSA framework (DETE, 2001, pp. 300-317), the three lessons provided opportunities for students to learn about, and show empathy with, and appreciation for, cultures and historical events, and perhaps in some ways to link their own personal experiences and things they enjoy to those enjoyed by Aboriginal people. After playing the games and having the party, still at the local reserve, the students in Lesson 5 learned about the resilience shown by Aboriginal families and communities in response to the events of genocide. Due to the sensitive nature that the events and impacts of genocide contain, I designed Lesson 5 to minimise discussion, rather having students individually respond to worksheets and reflections. 

After Lesson 6 (Rabbit Proof Fence; see Appendix 1), Lesson 7 involved reviewing the story of Nungala Fejo in the Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples (Australian Government, 2008) and parts of the Apology itself, when led to Unit 3.

Unit 3 (Lessons 8–11): Contemporary injustices

Unit 3 captured a range of information about contemporary injustices experienced by Aboriginal Australians. The four lessons in Unit 3 drew upon literature reviewed in Section 2.2 that details the racist stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal people. Without using technical jargon, the four lessons explored the ways racism may be interpersonal, internalised and systemic (institutionalised) in social policies, practices and processes—forms of racism that
Paradies and Cunningham (2009) report are experienced commonly by Aboriginal people.

In Lesson 8 the students considered statistics from the ABS (2005) detailing the discrepancies between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians (Appendix 1). These discrepancies include the social, health and economical privileges denied to Aboriginal people (Lawrence & Tatum, 1999; McIntosh, 1990). In Lesson 9, I arranged a visit by an African-Australian, Tanya, and they heard her experiences of racism. To further learn about the impact of racism specifically experienced by Aboriginal people, in Lesson 10 the students considered the prevalence and inaccuracies of racist myths about Aboriginal people. Then, in Lesson 11, students pondered race-related bias in relation to misrepresentations of Aboriginal people in news media, which led to them more fully appreciating and respecting contemporary Aboriginal achievements in Unit 4.

**Unit 4 (Lessons 12–16): Contemporary achievements**

The five lessons of this final unit presented students with recent achievements of numerous Aboriginal people—a learning outcomes endorsed by DETE (2001, p. 17). In Lesson 12 the students reviewed a good news story in the newspaper *The Independent* by Marks (2007) about the resilience of Aboriginal models amidst racism, and the inspiration they are to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. They then learned about the talented young Aboriginal actors Evelyn Sampi, Laura Monaghan and Tianna Sansbury while viewing *The Making of Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Thomas, 2002) in Lesson 13, and how the film was a breakthrough for Aboriginal Australians in placing the Stolen Generations in the international spotlight. They
learnt the film is based on the true story authored by Doris Pilkington that she titled Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence, which tells of three young Aboriginal girls: Molly (the author's mother), Daisy (Molly's sister) and their cousin Gracie, who escaped from a government settlement in 1931 and trek over 2,400 kilometres home by following the Rabbit Proof Fence. This lesson also involved them briefly hearing about an article by The Daily Telegraph (2009) about the Australian film Samson and Delilah winning the Cannes prize. Lesson 14 involved students reviewing three stories of sacrifice by Aboriginal soldiers in World War II efforts, and appreciated that, like the rest of the Indigenous population, they were not counted as citizens of Australia at the time. Online research of Australian Government (2013) National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) award winners for their contributions to Australian society (Lesson 15) preceded them meeting an Aboriginal elder, Stef, and listening to some of her stories about her culture and experiences in Lesson 16. Stef was a cultural educator at Tandanya Aboriginal Arts and Crafts centre in Adelaide, SA, an elder of the Ngarrindjeri language group in SA, and one of the two Aboriginal elders who advised me about the content of the program.

After designing and facilitating the program, I used several data collection techniques to attempt to understand the students’ learning experience.
3.2 Data collection

There were numerous data collection instruments that were used in this study, and this second section of this chapter elaborates on these, their value and the way they were implemented. To make it clear from the outset what these instruments comprised prior to going into details regarding their individual and collective purpose, strength and implementation throughout the course of this study, I present Table 3.2 which provides a clear overview of what the eight research instruments were and what they comprised.

As the program was facilitated in the participating students’ regular middle school English classes, a variety of English text responses produced by the students were collected and used as data. These included the texts students submitted for assessment in the form of narratives and expositions, as well as some non-assessed pieces of work, including their completion of worksheets. These assessment and non-assessment tasks comprised regular English criteria; they were required to take care in the structuring of their responses and in their clarity, spelling and grammar. They were not assessed on learning outcomes associated with their cognitive or affective responses to Aboriginal people and to learning about them, and this was made very clear to them in order that they felt autonomy in expressing their true thoughts and feelings. These assessed tasks however, like the non-assessed worksheet and lesson and program reflection tasks, provided me with insight into their initial and possible their changing perspectives and attitudes. However, attitudes have also commonly been identified and measured using quantified approaches, and I reviewed literature into the value of blending quantified data with what would predominantly be
qualitative data gathered from the students’ responses and reflections, which are elaborated on in this second section of this chapter.

Table 3.2  Research instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey 1</td>
<td>A Likert-scale survey that students in Class A and B completed prior to engaging in Lesson 1 of the program. The survey required students to indicate their perspective of Aboriginal people (presented in Appendix 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2</td>
<td>A Likert-scale survey that students in Class A and B completed immediately after Survey 1 and prior to engaging in Lesson 1. The survey required the students to indicate their perspective or impression of an unknown white non-Aboriginal boy pictured in a black and white photograph, and an unknown Aboriginal boy also pictured in a black and white photograph (presented in Appendix 4). To identify any differences in students’ attitudes towards Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary response task</td>
<td>Students were required as part of their assessment to produce a narrative from the imagined perspective of an Aboriginal elder, reflecting on their childhood (Aboriginal cultures) through to experiences of genocide of communities, forcible removal of children from their families, and contemporary racism (examples presented in Appendix 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(narratives)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary response task</td>
<td>Students were also required to produce expositions, also written from the imagined perspective of an Aboriginal person, presenting incidents of past and present racism experienced by Aboriginal people (examples presented in Appendix 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(expositions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson reflections task</td>
<td>At the close of each of the 16 lessons in the program students were required to complete short Lesson Reflections to indicate what they learned and what they felt (see Appendix 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program reflections task</td>
<td>At the end of the program students were asked to write a few paragraphs about what they considered to be the significant learning moments for them, including in relation to any of their altered thought and feelings (see Appendix 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 3</td>
<td>Identical to Survey 2 (presented in Appendix 4), but asking the students to indicate their perspective of Aboriginal people in light of or in response to what they have learned about Aboriginal people throughout the program of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 4</td>
<td>Also identical to Survey 2 (presented in Appendix 4), but in relation to students’ perspectives of Aboriginal people six months after the final lesson of the program of learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I explore the quantified Likert scale surveys that I opted to implement, in light of such surveys having been previously been successfully used in research into racism by Henry and Sears (2002), with their research elaborated on a little further in Section 3.2.2. In determining whether to use quantified data (and particularly Likert scale surveys), or whether it best to simply collect and analyse qualitative data produced by students, I weighed the advantages and disadvantages of numerical measures. LaMarca (2011) reports on both the strengths and the weaknesses of Likert scale surveys. In relation to the weaknesses, LaMarca (2011) states that Likert scales and other quantified data cannot capture vast, multi-dimensional attitudes that a population can hold. The five to seven options of levels of agreement (including levels of disagreement and uncertainty) that the scales provide, LaMarca (2011) explains, cannot be evenly spread, nor capture all the attitudes a respondent might have, and accordingly cannot measure attitudes with complete accuracy. Also, respondents’ answers are influenced by previous statements and how these statements were answered, and responses may largely be on the one side (either agreement or disagreement). Due to possible negative implications of appearing to take extreme views, respondents may also avoid choosing strong agreement and strong disagreement, although this may actually be the true nature of their attitude.

I decided to gather and analyse quantified data (particularly Likert scale surveys) as well as qualitative data due to the strength of insight it can offer, while keeping these weaknesses presented by LaMarca (2011) in mind. In a balanced argument, LaMarca (2011) also presents various strengths of Likert scale surveys, and explains that some of the weaknesses can be countered, such as by mixing up positive and negative statements requires participants to consider each statement with care. This results in
participants’ responses being on both sides of agreement and disagreement when the same (positive or negative) attitude is held. Also, LaMarca (2011) explains that Likert scale surveys are universal, and, accordingly, easy to understand and use. Respondents can also feel more at ease with them, because degrees or levels of agreement are asked for rather than definite responses of yes or no. More so, responses are easily quantifiable and computable to provide an indication of attitudes. Similarly, Romano, Donovan, Chen and Nunamaker (2003) state that quantified data can help researchers better understand and report on large amounts of qualitative data, towards providing meaningful affective, cognitive, contextual, and evaluative information insights into participants’ attitudes and beliefs. Losby and Wetmore (2012, p. 4) explain that Likert scales are effective for assessing participants’ knowledge or awareness of an issue, or their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, with responses being comparative, due to being in an ‘ordered continuum’ (p. 5).

Throughout my reporting of students’ responses I place emphasis on the word *indication*, identifying that such self-reporting measures hold the various weaknesses as recognised by LaMarca (2011). The qualitative responses and reflections, detailed in Section 3.2.1, produced by students are drawn upon most heavily in the preceding discussion chapters in exploring their initial and possible changing views of and feelings toward Aboriginal people. Altogether, there were nine research instruments that were used to explore the students’ engagement throughout the program. As Table 3.3 outlines, four of the instruments were quantified (Surveys 1, 2, 3 and 4), four were qualitative (program reflections, narratives and expositions), and lesson reflections were a combination of both. The table shows the lessons in which the
instruments were used, and shows the links and interplays between these instruments and the data—for example, the quantified data pointed me to the students’ rich reflections and creative responses (narratives and expositions). This second section of this chapter details these various instruments that were used for collating qualitative and quantified data, toward seeing if there was any alteration in students’ thoughts and feelings.

### Table 3.3 Research instruments for linking qualitative with qualified data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson/s Data gathering approach</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Comparisons to qualitative instruments</th>
<th>Comparisons to quantified instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey 1</td>
<td>Quantified</td>
<td>Survey 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey 2</td>
<td>Quantified</td>
<td>Survey 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–10</td>
<td>Literary response (narratives)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Surveys 1, 2, 3, 4 (shifts in perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–15</td>
<td>Literary response (expositions)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Surveys 1, 2, 3, 4 (shifts in perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–16</td>
<td>Lesson reflections</td>
<td>Quantified / Qualitative</td>
<td>Surveys 1, 2, 3, 4 (shifts in perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Program reflections</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Surveys 1, 2, 3, 4 (shifts in perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Survey 3</td>
<td>Quantified</td>
<td>Survey 1, 4 (to identify shifts in perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 mths Later</td>
<td>Survey 4</td>
<td>Quantified</td>
<td>Survey 1, 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.1 Qualitative instruments and data

This study involved a cyclical methodological process, resembling aspects of action research described by Kemmis and Taggart (2005) that comprised planning the program, facilitating it, collecting the students’ responses for analysis and reflecting on their engagement, before then determining a new cycle in light of these new understandings. The process involved me learning a lot about ways students can engage in learning, and possibly challenge and change their preconceptions of another ethnic group.

Throughout the program of learning the students produced a number of different types of responses, including narratives and expositions, which they could produce from the perspective of an Aboriginal character. The intention of these literary responses was for them to consolidate and articulate what they were learning about, and to imagine the cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people. Also, at the end of each lesson, students reflected on what they learned, and how they felt in response. At the conclusion of the program they reflected on the learning moments that were most significant to them—including if anything challenged or changed any of their perspectives or and feelings toward Aboriginal people.

Reflections

The students’ succinct reflections at the end of each lesson (lesson reflections) and their more detailed, overarching reflections of the significant learning moments at the end of the program (program reflections) provided me with insight into their thoughts about and feelings toward what they were learning. Their reflections revealed their critical thinking about society in relation to injustices experienced by
Aboriginal people, as well as any new perspectives or feelings toward Aboriginal people they might be developing. Accordingly, the students’ reflections are given prominence in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 as it is explored whether their learning experience altered any of attitudes (see examples of the lesson and program reflections prior to coding in Appendix 2).

The half-page lesson reflections generated quantified as well as qualitative data, as student indicated what was most significant to them in each lesson and also numerically indicated what they felt about Aboriginal people in the lesson, such as kindness, sympathy and thoughtfulness, and to what extent. They selected on a 5-point Likert scale if they thought the lesson helped them improve their perspectives regarding Aboriginal people, and if they felt comfortable and understood what they studied. Like Romano et al. (2003) and Losby and Wetmore (2012), I determined such measures to be helpful in obtaining an insight into students’ progressing thoughts and feelings, and I identified that these reflections would be quick and easy for students to complete within the last five minutes of each lesson.

As with students’ lesson reflections, their program reflections, produced after completing the last lesson of the program, were produced individually and privately by students. In these they wrote about what they enjoyed and what they did, and what did or did not challenge and inspire them. They were also asked to reflect on whether or not their awareness of the presence and impact of racism had increased, what their initial thoughts and feelings toward Aboriginal people were, and whether these had changed. Becoming aware of the cultures and also the social injustices of minority groups in society is, according to the objectives of this study (elaborated on in Section 1.3) and to the view point of other educators such as Bigelow (2007a) and
Montgomery (2006) (elaborated on in Section 2.2.1), a useful pro-justice and anti-racism objective.

**Creative and critical responses**

Creative and critical responses are a common response-type in the subject area of English, including in the English Literacy learning strand in the new National Curriculum Framework. Janesick (1999) reports on the value of using rich text responses as a research instrument, as they provide an opportunity for students to articulate what they are learning about. Fleischman (2006) adds that they allow students to freely express their emerging understandings. The critical thinking involved before and after producing these responses was aimed at providing them with space to question the perspectives that they personally hold as well as those that others in society hold. Creative responses—narratives in the case of this study—provided me with rich insights into any affective responses the students might demonstrate, while their expository writing revealed critical thinking about the social and racial issues they were presented with. Narrative writing in particular permitted students to imagine the thoughts and feelings of Aboriginal people, and maybe to better appreciate their circumstances as learned about in Units 1–3. Expository writing provided students with the opportunity, should they wish, to communicate moral indignation about the social injustices experienced by Aboriginal people. Indeed, Craven (2013) reports that students are shocked to learn of the violence of past race relations in Australia. The structure and content of their expositions were informed by what they learned in Unit 4, providing opportunity to argue for justice for, and recognition of, Aboriginal people. Some examples of the students’ draft and
Along with their reflections, students’ narrative writing provided insight into the students’ learning experience, particularly the affective components. Narrative writing provided students with the opportunity to imagine being an Aboriginal person; walking in their shoes to reflect on components of Aboriginal cultures and social experiences. By the beginning of Unit 4, when commencing writing expositions to promote the achievements of Aboriginal people, students had completed their narratives. Many of these narratives were written from the perspective of an Aboriginal character, reflecting on life from prior to British arrival (Unit 1) through to imagined experiences oft-times torrid race-related injustices (Unit 2) to ongoing experiences with racism (Unit 3). Chapter 7 in particular explores if the students were able to identify some similarities between themselves and Aboriginal people. It also explores whether students might start to identify how Aboriginal people might think and feel in response to the social injustices they have experienced, and also to commence thinking and feeling in appropriate or reasonable ways for them. The students gave their character personality traits, and this study explores whether these traits reflected the representations of the Aboriginal people incorporated in the lessons and students new perspectives as seen in their Survey 3 responses, hence showing the role—albeit limited—of quantified data (Surveys 1 and 2 are presented in Appendix 4, with a note that Surveys 3 and 4 are identical to Survey 1).
3.2.2 Quantified data

As introduced earlier in Section 3.2, other research studies into racial prejudice among population samples have also used numerical measures (Henry & Sears (2002), and in this same vein this study draws upon quantified data. Henry and Sears (2002) report on the success of the 1997 and 1998 Los Angeles County Social Surveys (LACSS), which used Likert scales to identify the racial attitudes of research participants. They report that prejudice was measured in the two surveys by asking participants to make a selection from a 4-point Likert item in response to whether minorities, including African Americans, are less intellectually able than other groups of people. Likert scales provide a baseline measure. Bogner and Wiseman (2006), in their teaching of adolescent students about caring for the environment, report on the need to determine quantitative baseline measures, from which to then measure any change of attitudes among students during their participation in lessons.

Quantified data provided me with what Traynor (2011) describes as a narrow lens for identifying some trends in the students’ perspectives toward Aboriginal people. While this study is predominantly qualitative, some quantified data were gathered—not for drawing conclusive claims, but to glean some insight about students’ initial, and perhaps altering, perspectives about and feelings toward Aboriginal people. From these indications I turned to the richer, qualitative responses and reflections they produced, to see if the quantified data complemented the qualitative data.

Quantified data were gathered via the four surveys, that were conducted at the beginning of Lesson 1 (Surveys 1 and 2), then immediately after Lesson 16 (Survey 3) and six months after the completion of the program (Survey 4). These surveys
provided some indication of initial preconceptions and any immediate and medium-term effect of the program in relation to students’ changing perspectives.

Survey 1 asked students to respond to a range of personality traits describing Aboriginal people. This involved them identifying who or what they perceived or conceptualised ‘Aboriginal people’ to be. By again drawing upon the usefulness of Likert scale surveys (Losby & Wetmore, 2012), students were asked to select responses on a 5-point Likert scale of ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘unsure’, ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ in response to descriptive traits, such as gentle and its antonym, aggressive. This complements what Burns and Burns (2011, p. 250) state should be the case in Likert scale surveys regarding the symmetric nature of positive and negative positioned statements. The students’ responses to the positive and negative traits describing Aboriginal people were to balance, and they did—that is, where they agreed with a positive trait (e.g. forgiving) they, for the main part, conversely disagreed with the negative (antonym) trait (e.g. unforgiving). Accordingly, to keep reporting simple, in ensuring discussion chapters I focus on the students levels of agreement (or disagreement) to the positive traits only.

Immediately following Survey 1, Survey 2 involved students indicating the personality traits they perceived a white non-Aboriginal Australian boy having—knowing nothing about the boy and with only a photograph to go by. In this photo he was smiling, wearing a dressing gown and standing in front of a man—perhaps his father—who was holding a baby and also smiling. Survey 2 then asked students to select levels of agreement to the same personality traits, but this time in response to a photograph of an Aboriginal boy who was also unknown to them—the boy was bare-chested, folding his arms, frowning and standing behind an overturned wheelbarrow.
Survey 2 (with photographs) is presented in Appendix 4. Such surveys are not new. As stated earlier in Section 3.2, Henry and Sears (2002) report that the LACSS used Likert scale measures to identify Americans attitudes towards minority groups, including African Americans, including in relation to respondents perceived them as unintelligent.

Surveys 1 and 2 provided me with some indication of students’ initial preconceptions, and also made students aware of these preconceptions, which contributed to disorienting their perspectives. Survey 2 was particularly useful for disorientation. After the students responded to the two unknown boys in the photographs, I revealed their identities. This revelation unsettled their perspectives (the responses to the survey and to the disorientation are elaborated on in Section 4.2).

Survey 1 was useful to me as a baseline indication of students’ initial preconceptions. Vickers (2001) explains the importance and use of baseline measures, as a way of identify if there is any change over the course of a study. Quantified scores were given to these levels, in which strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, unsure = 3 (hence a mid-point), agree = 4 and strongly agree = 5. As Burns and Burns (2011) state, the range captures the intensity of their feelings for a given item—students’ attitudes towards or perspectives of Aboriginal people in the case of this study. These scores were allocated to Survey 1 responses and then to responses to the identical Surveys 3 and 4, to provide an indication—albeit limited—of immediate and medium-term alteration of perspectives.

I remain uncertain if students’ occasional selection of unsure demonstrated a position of not prejudging Aboriginal people, a level of agreement that resides between
disagree and agree, or a way not to not reveal personal preconceptions students held. Also, selecting unsure could indicate a students’ unwillingness to presume characteristics of Aboriginal people while they are still learning more to agree or disagree. More so, there might be different interpretations or weighting given by different students to the levels of agreement—two students might select agree for instance but one student may feel it more strongly than the other. Keeping these limitations in mind, these instruments provide only indicative insight into the students’ tendencies in how they responded to who they perceived ‘Aboriginal people’ to be.

The students’ lesson reflections provided the opportunity for them to reflect on whether they thought their perspectives were changing, and also whether they experienced any feelings during the lesson. Lesson reflections invited the students to indicate the extent to which they felt kindness or thoughtfulness, affiliation or connection, acceptance or appreciation, liking or affection and sympathy or compassion (see Appendix 2). Two similar words, such as sympathy and compassion, were provided for each emotion to build their vocabulary of potential feelings. As with the survey responses, these indications prompted me to search for various expressions of emotion in their reflections, narratives and expositions. Similarly, these indications of feelings are not given weight in the discussion chapters (Chapters 4–8)—they mainly assisted me to recognise the types and strength of feelings experienced to look for in the students’ writing. The students’ responses to Likert scale levels of agreement in response to the statements ‘I felt comfortable in this lesson’, ‘I understood what was taught in this lesson’ and ‘this lesson assisted me to improve my perspectives about Aboriginal people’ were used in similar ways.
A quantitative instrument that was invaluable as a platform for exploring students’ rich responses was attached to Survey 3, in which students were asked to identify which lessons might have assisted them to review their perspectives. To help them do this, after selecting levels of agreement to Survey 3, they were confidentially provided with a copy of their Survey 1 responses to compare their initial and new levels of agreement. Next to the traits where they had increased their level of agreement from Survey 1 to Survey 3 (for instance, if their response to ‘friendly’ changed from disagree to unsure, strongly disagree to agree or agree to strongly agree) they reflected on and indicated what lesson/s assisted them to alter this perspective. To help remind them of what the lessons comprised, I provided a one-sentence description of each of the 16 lessons. I then used these indications to explore students’ reflections, narratives and other responses produced during and after these lessons (for homework) to identify if these pieces of writing revealed their new perspectives. These techniques assisted me to better understand and report if and how students challenged and perhaps changed their perspectives about, and feelings toward, Aboriginal people, and their understandings of Australian society.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Following planning and implementing the program, I observed and reflected on students’ engagement in, and responses to, their learning. After observing and reflecting on the responses and reflections of Class A, some tweaks were made to the program for its implementation with Class B in the following year. The purpose of this initial form of analysis and tweaking was to provide students with maximum opportunity to challenge and perhaps change their perspectives about and feelings toward Aboriginal people. After both classes had completed the program a more
thorough process commenced that comprised thematic analysis of students’ explicit responses in both classes (elaborated on in Section 3.3).

I chose to use thematic analysis despite the criticism of Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) that it can create diverse interpretations of data and missing nuances due to slight variances in participants’ responses. I weighed their questioning of validity and reliability against the flexibility the methodology provides (Braun & Clarke, 2006), particularly for dealing with large data sets (Saldana, 2012). Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012), in reporting on theme-based techniques in systematic and rigorous qualitative analysis for making sense of data, concede that thematic analysis can be reliable through careful adherence to a common, consistent approach to data interpretation. With careful pre-planning and the application of consistent approaches, such analysis provided me with the ability to perform a thorough study of emerging concepts or themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006)—the students’ responses to and reflections on the program.

This section outlines the thematic analysis process I used to code all of the students’ responses and reflections, thus identifying themes from the raw data for later analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The theming process involved considering the inter-relatedness of different components of the students’ learning, and identifying the repeated ideas, common terms, analogies and similarities across their written responses and reflections (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldana, 2012). I reviewed the entire data set numerous times to identify all links to possible themes, coding all data under these themes, as well as finer sub-themes and categories, until all the data were broken up into appropriate themes and sub-themes (Saldana, 2012, p. 69). Similar to the scope provided by Saldana, thematic analysis afforded me the means to ascertain
how the students were responding to what they were learning about. The thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as well as Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) guided my coding of the data, identification and further definition of the themes to then reporting the students’ learning experience—commencing with becoming familiar with the students’ responses and reflections.

It was during this process that resonance with components of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) emerged, and I turned again to review TLT literature to further identify aspects of learning experiences of adults as framed by the theory that share commonalities with the learning experiences of the students in this study. Ensuing chapters explore these resemblances—such as in relation to the various forms of disorientation the adolescent students experienced (Chapter 4), the level of new discourse the engaged in (Chapter 5), their altered perspectives (Chapter 6) and the feelings they developed (Chapters 7-8). As I increased my understanding of the learning theory and identified further resemblances, as well as divergences, between it and the learning experiences of the adolescent students in this study, I better understood the ways they altered their perspectives and feelings. Based on the TLT concepts in this literature, I developed four new themes to reflect the experience of the students in this study in context of their adolescence:

1. critical thinking and reflecting
2. disorientations and dilemmas (and students challenging their perspectives)
3. some shifts in perspectives
4. some affective shift.
Table 3.4 lists the original anti-racism themes that had emerged from my review of literature (Chapter 2) and that I initially used to start coding the students’ responses to the program of learning. These comprised critical thinking, some quite confrontational and challenging learning moments, new perspectives and changes of emotions. Respectively, I identified resonance between these four themes and four components of TLT, these being critical discourse and critical reflection, disorienting dilemmas, perspective transformation and the development of emotional responses. However, due to the nature of the particular program of learning explored in this study and as the students are not adults—and I do not claim they experienced the same degree or depth of discourse, reflection or perspective alteration—I altered these themes again. The new themes, respectively, are critical thinking and reflecting, disorientations (and students challenging their perspectives), some alteration of perspectives that included some affective changes.

Table 3.4  Thematic analysis: Original and new themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original theme</th>
<th>TLT component</th>
<th>New theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>Critical discourse and</td>
<td>Critical thinking and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>critical reflection</td>
<td>reflecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging learning moments</td>
<td>Disorienting dilemmas</td>
<td>Disorientations (and students challenging their perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New perspectives</td>
<td>Perspective transformation</td>
<td>Some alteration of perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of emotions</td>
<td>Development of emotional responses</td>
<td>Some affective alteration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Familiarisation

Before developing the themes used for categorising the data (and before resonance with TLT emerged), as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), I read and re-read the entire data set in order to become familiar with it. It was important to initially be familiar with all the students’ responses and reflections in order to begin to understand the emergent themes, as well as sub-themes and categories that determined the codes to be applied to all of the data. As described by Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012), the coding process itself assisted me to become further familiar with the data.

Generating initial codes and searching for themes

I created the initial codes as I became familiar with the students’ responses and reflections and determined overarching themes in the data. I developed codes and marked these on photocopies of the students’ responses and reflections (which were kept safe, locked in a filing cabinet) to indicate which parts of their writing (sentences and paragraphs) indicated particular learning experiences, such as students challenging any of their initial thoughts and feelings. As the resemblances with TLT became clearer, I redeveloped the codes and re-coded all the data using these new themes. Often, one sentence or paragraph was given numerous codes—for instance, a student’s reflection on being surprised by the emphasis Aboriginal people placed on community was attributed to both experiencing disorientation as well as some alteration of perspective.
Table 3.5 details how these codes were formed to capture the themes, sub-themes and categories they contain, using disorienting dilemmas as way of example. For instance, the code ‘DD A/NT ap’ indicates sections of students’ responses or reflections that reveal a disorientation or dilemma (theme: DD) of their prior adverse or negative thinking, or preconceptions, (sub-theme: A/NT) regarding the appearance (category: ap) of Aboriginal people. The photocopied pages of the students’ responses and reflections are covered with a multitude of codes that assisted me to develop and structure the story of the students’ learning journey presented in this thesis. Generating the sub-themes, categories and codes under these new themes required going backward and forward between data-types (e.g. narrative writing and survey results) to find resonances. Reviewing the data numerous times ensured data saturation, in which all the emergent concepts were appropriately coded (Saldana, 2012, pp. 69-70)—which Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) explain is required for developing concrete codes for handling entire data sets.

Reviewing the themes, further defining the themes and reporting

After developing the themes that reflected components of TLT, I considered the ways the themes adequately resembled the data (the students’ reflections and responses) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To do this, I further reviewed the TLT literature to more fully ascertain areas of resonance with the students’ learning experiences, while also noting the points of difference. I reviewed not only the themes, but also the sub-themes that contained concepts of TLT; this process ensured the appropriateness of the categories and codes (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). I also reviewed the themes and sub-themes (or patterns) to identify the way the story
should be told (Braun & Clarke, 2006)—the story in this study comprising the learning experience of the students.

Table 3.5  Codes, categories, sub-theories for the theme Disorientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D A/NT ap</td>
<td>Disorientation (D)</td>
<td>Aversion / negative thinking (A/NT)</td>
<td>Appearance (ap)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D A/NT ab</td>
<td>(and students</td>
<td>Abilities (ab)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D A/NT sr</td>
<td>challenging their</td>
<td>Social relations (sr)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D A/NT sp</td>
<td>perspectives)</td>
<td>Social presence (sp)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D A/NF r</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aversion / negative</td>
<td>Resistance (r)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D A/NF b</td>
<td></td>
<td>feelings (A/NF)</td>
<td>Boredom (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D A/NF a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Apathy (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D A/NF f</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fear (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD S ai</td>
<td></td>
<td>Surprise (S)</td>
<td>At injustice (ai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD S aop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>At own perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD A Ac</td>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciation (A)</td>
<td>Aboriginal culture (Ac)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD A Ap</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aboriginal people (Ap)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD A r</td>
<td></td>
<td>Resilience (r)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD C Ac</td>
<td></td>
<td>Connection (C)</td>
<td>Aboriginal culture (Ac)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD C Ap</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aboriginal people (Ap)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I then further defined the themes by linking them to interesting and relevant concepts in the literature, including cognitive and affective forms of empathy (explored in Chapter 7) and expressions of allophilia (Chapter 8). In reporting or telling the story of the students’ learning experiences, the students’ narrative writing (particularly in Chapter 7) and reflections on significant learning moments are drawn upon—in order for emphasis to be placed on their voice.
The themes, sub-themes and categories generated through thematic analysis shapes the structure of the upcoming discussion chapters, commencing with the concept of the students experiencing disorientation of their preconceptions.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Before conducting the research, I had briefed the School Board of the Independent Christian School in the northern suburbs of Adelaide at which the study was conducted, and obtained their consent. In May 2009 I obtained ethics clearance from the Charles Darwin University Human Ethics Research Committee (CDU HREC). The directions for engaging in ethical research contained in the HREC application shaped the finer detail of how I went about conducting this study. For instance, the plain language information sheet or letter as well as the participation consent form for signing (both presented in Appendix 5) were read and explained to the students on 3 August 2009 for Class A and 9 May 2010 for Class B—two weeks prior to the commencement of the programs. The Information Sheet outlined to the students that at any time during the program they could opt to withdraw from the research, and temporarily join another Year 8 class for the remainder of the program. All the students in both classes, together with a parent, signed and returned the Consent Form prior to the commencement of the program, and no student opted to withdraw from the program.

Maintaining student confidentiality throughout and after the research was essential. I allocated a participant number to each student immediately before Survey 1 was conducted (at the beginning of Lesson 1). Students wrote their participant number at the top of all written submissions, including the four surveys and the three
assessment tasks (narratives and expositions), their 16 lesson reflections and their program reflections. I checked that each student had written their number on each item as I collected them. Later, when I commenced the reporting phase (drafting the discussion chapters), pseudonyms replaced the numbers. A list of students’ names against their code numbers and pseudonyms has been kept and remains confidential, locked in a filing cabinet along with the surveys, reflections, narratives and expositions.

I remained mindful throughout the program to ensure students felt at liberty to respond and reflect in the ways they wanted. This was a methodological as well as an ethical consideration. I made it clear to them that a ‘right’ response is an honest response, and that I was only using English criteria (e.g. spelling, grammar, structure and writing conventions) to assess their work, and not their initial or new thoughts and feelings toward Aboriginal people. My role as both the teacher and the researcher required a nuanced balance—to remain mindful not to push my own beliefs or biases on the students and not to coerce a response. However, I also realised that my position as teacher and researcher meant that I was heavily immersed in all phases of the program. I was mindful and deliberate about not attempting to change the students’ perspectives and feelings, even if some may not be moved by some social injustices learned about. To minimise students influencing each other’s responses, they wrote their lesson and program reflections individually and silently.

The wellbeing of all participating students remained my highest priority throughout the program. I know it can be challenging for learners to become aware of the reality of racism and how it can manifest —and possibly also the preconceptions that they
might hold (Lee, 2006; West, 1999). I accordingly created and maintained an encouraging, positive and supportive learning environment, and modelled democratic thinking by being open to all comments. I planned ahead of time that if students appeared unsettled I would ask them individually and privately if they are okay, and use my judgment to decide whether to remind them that they could withdraw from participating in the study. This need, however, did not arise; although some students were challenged by what they learned about (elaborated on in Section 5.1).

Upcoming chapters explore the ways students responded—whether they engaged with what they learned, and challenged and perhaps changed any preconceptions they may have held.

### 3.5 Summary

The cyclical methodological process in this study, resembling aspects of action research described by Kemmis and Taggart (2005), comprising planning the program, facilitating it, collecting the students’ responses for analysis and reflecting on their engagement and then determining a new cycle in light of these new understandings—involved me in learning a lot about ways students can engage in learning, and possibly challenge and change their preconceptions of another ethnic group. Resonances with TLT then emerged when thematic analysis was applied, and these provided a springboard from which to explore the experience of the students in this study. In the following chapter I set out to discover from the students’ points of view—evident in their reflections and literary responses, if they perhaps challenged and changed any preconceptions they may have held towards Aboriginal people. The exploration commences with a look at the ways students experienced disorientation.
Chapter 4  Disorientation
I was starting to see that the things that I had previously heard were now looking a lot less truthful as they had before. Studying the wheel of oppression gave me a better insight into the chain reaction that starts at being shunned and possibly ends up in crime. I realised that when prejudice takes root in people’s minds and then flows out through the media it then spreads around like a disease and infects others, who then come to the same biased conclusions.

(Gail, Class A, 21 August 2009)

The program of learning, outlined in Section 3.1.1, presented new information about Australian society and the Indigenous population to the 12–14-year-old Year 8 students in two of my English classes—the first in 2009 and the second in 2010. The information contrasted with and challenged numerous aspects about Aboriginal people they had previously heard and often believed. Challenging learning moments are not uncommon in anti-racism education among child and adolescent students (Bigelow, 2007a), and I explored the ways I might challenge my students’ preconceptions about Aboriginal people.

I was mindful when facilitating the program of learning that this new information may well contrast with the students’ preconceptions. Generally speaking, teachers do not intend to unsettle students’ understandings and potentially have them feel uncomfortable; however, I acknowledged that this might be unavoidable when incorporating aspects of SA’s curriculum (DETE, 2001) regarding the teaching and learning of Aboriginal cultures and experiences (also incorporated in the new National Curriculum Framework).

The differences between students’ prior understandings and the information contained in the program meant they were learning anew about Aboriginal people—
about rich cultural diversity, brutal histories, ongoing injustices and contemporary accomplishments. This new discourse was new and unfamiliar, and may well unsettle and challenge their perspectives. The student to whom I gave the pseudonym Gail, for instance, as seen in the above extract from her learning reflections, recognised that her understandings about Aboriginal people that had been influenced by social and media discourses were ‘now looking a lot less truthful as they had before’.

The unfamiliar, positive messages about Aboriginal people presented during the initial stages of the program that were at odds with their preconceptions disoriented these students. I had not been aware of the possible resemblance to TLT, but as Mezirow (in Foroughi, Irving & Savage, 2010, p. 77) states, disorienting dilemmas unsettle deeply held views that learners hold. King (2011, p. 92) elaborates; at the onset of transformative learning, experiencing a disorienting dilemma makes students uncertain.

Some resonance is seen in this study with disorienting dilemmas that commence or ‘trigger’ learning, which can become transformative (Mezirow, 2000). While some researchers report on learning experiences in which some children and adolescents challenge and develop new understandings, I could find no educational theory for adolescents that resemble the learning experienced by the students in this study. It seemed that by tackling racism towards Aboriginal Australians I could not avoid disorienting the students, and I sought to understand this dilemma I faced as a teacher. It was during data analysis that some resonance with TLT was seen (explored in Section 2.3). This included a degree of resemblance between the students’ initial learning moments and the concepts associated with a disorienting dilemma. However, and as elaborated on in Chapters 2 and 3, TLT is an adult
learning theory, and care is taken to only consider some possible resonance with, and applications of, concepts of disorienting dilemmas and other TLT components to understand the learning process and outcomes of the adolescent students in this study.

This chapter places emphasis on the initial stimulus, Lesson 1, that disoriented or unsettled the students’ prior understandings by challenging them to think about any preconceptions about Aboriginal people they initially held. As Klobucar (2010, p. 268) states, disorienting dilemmas act as a stimulus, from which learners ‘question their current frames of reference’. Jones (2011, p. 144) similarly states disorienting dilemmas can be a stimulus ‘to disrupt a student’s comfortable position and to challenge existing beliefs or values’. Finnegan (2011) and Wong et al. (2011) likewise report disorienting dilemmas are valuable in achieving anti-racism learning outcomes in which students’ beliefs about a different ethnic group are challenged (elaborated on in Section 5.1). This chapter not only explores this initial disorienting stimulus, but also other moments of disorientation—for, as explored, all learners’ experiences are affected at different times and by different stimuli. Also, as Mezirow (2000) elaborates, profound disorienting dilemmas cannot be rushed but require time. Thus, I explore in ensuing chapters other disorienting moments that occurred later in the program, and how students were able to accommodate this new and unsettling learning.

Although the adolescent students in this study were disoriented at different moments, it was the initial stimulus provided by Lesson 1 that established the direction of the program—in which the students, in their own ways, might challenge their preconceptions about Aboriginal people. This initial stimulus intended to make them
uncertain regarding what to believe about Aboriginal people. It made them unsure about former beliefs based on hearsay through conversations with friends and family, and viewing social media. Numerous students, like Gail in the extract above, did reflect on what they had previously believed and how they proceeded to challenge those beliefs.

4.1 Students’ initial attitudes and preconceptions

At the beginning of the term I felt prejudice towards the Aboriginal people [sic]. I also felt distance and a distinct feel of fear towards them. (Emma, Class B, 28 May 2010)

For the purpose of exploring effective learning that may involve the Year 8 students challenging and perhaps changing their preconceptions about Aboriginal people, I initially sought to identify what their attitudes were through the implementation of Surveys 1 and 2. I was mindful to try to accommodate the personalities and learning preferences of the students in facilitating the program, aware of the sensitive nature of learning about racism—including considering if they actually held any prejudices. I recognised it may well be difficult for them to admit to such preconceptions due to political correctness and the social expectations associated with being or appearing tolerant—with such social pressures resulting in racism often going undetected (Bonnett, 2000; Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 2000). Amidst such political and social climates, York (2003) and also Connolly and Hoskens (2006) report that prejudices can often be learned but also quickly learned to be hidden by children, even as early as from two-years-old, and may remain hidden into adulthood (Dirkx, 2011). Students might also not recognise or believe they have these, or may think that what
they believe is correct. However, Connolly and Hoskens (2006) report that the six to seven-year-old students in their classroom in England developed an awareness of and respect for diversity through theatre, workshops and related teacher-led classroom activities. The students started recognising instances of exclusion, and they found some effect on the children’s attitudes to specific ethnic differences (although no evidence was found of any change in their racial attitudes).

I was also conscious of contextual considerations at the research School, an Independent school of a minority Christian denomination located in the low SES area of northern Adelaide. As stated in Section 1.2, when this study commenced the School consisted of a white-oriented homogenous culture, with minimal focus on multiculturalism in its curriculum and extra-curricular activities. The Year 8 students’ prior learning about Aboriginal people comprised listening to one or two Dreaming stories that detail some Aboriginal groups’ beliefs about creation, but without any background about the associated cultures. As West (1999) suggests, the telling of decontextualised Dreaming stories can perpetuate stereotypes about, and prejudices toward, Aboriginal people. Also, the telling of Aboriginal beliefs about creation can oppose the creation position that the school might promote, which might reinforce prejudices against Aboriginal people. NATSISS reports that racism is often experienced by Aboriginal people (ABS, 2003; elaborated on in Chapter 2).

Influenced by often negative social and media discourses, the students entered the program holding various presumptions. The disorienting stimulus that Lesson 1 provided first allowed the students to indicate the traits that they perceive Aboriginal people to have, to provide an indication of their beliefs about Aboriginal people. The initial lesson then provided students opportunity to individually reflect on these
beliefs, which I hoped would prompt them to consider how they might engage in the program of learning.

To not sway the students in relation to what traits they would indicate they believed Aboriginal people to hold, and to help them to identify any preconceptions they might have held I built into the survey some of the vocabulary that we had explored in an earlier English lessons.

The first indication of prejudicial thoughts or feelings held by any student was a few days after the students engaged in Lesson 1. Matt made some glib remarks about Aboriginal people (of the sort that I had heard many times before) after he had selected unsure in his responses.

When facilitating the program, and when reporting on it in this chapter, I refer to the students’ initial responses as ‘preconceptions’, reserving terms such as ‘prejudice’ and ‘racist’ to the students’ reflections on their own thoughts and feelings. Emma, for instance, admitted initially feeling prejudice towards, as well as distance from and fear of, Aboriginal people, as captured in the extract that commenced this section. I make this distinction between the terms I used and the terms students used because of the different understandings between teacher/researcher and students regarding what prejudice and racism comprise. Also, suggesting that another person has demonstrated racism is not good for building or maintaining relationships—particularly teacher-student relationships—and my role was to lead the students’ enquiry so that their own understandings would grow. The program of learning provided space for students to consider and weigh their preconceptions about Aboriginal people for themselves when they were ready, hence it was acceptable if they delayed naming this as prejudice or racism, or did not at all. Various lessons in
the program introduced students to some racial stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination that some, or even many, Aboriginal people experience, so they could consider the impact and how these might reflect their own responses to Aboriginal people.

Lesson 1 involved the students filling out Surveys 1 and 2, with Survey 1 requiring them to respond to numerous traits that could describe Aboriginal people by selecting *strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree* or *strongly agree*. The students had earlier indicated that they knew no or very few Aboriginal people, and had developed their understandings from friends and family, and television and radio programs. Regardless of the lack of personal experience, many proceeded to select *disagree or strongly disagree* for many of the positive traits in relation to their view of Aboriginal people. The range of traits comprised: forgiving, approachable, patient, godly, fun-loving, resilient, well-presented, advanced, team-oriented, wise, loving, gentle, responsible, good leaders, beautiful spirits, humble, talented, peaceful, generous, good parents, interesting, beautiful and humorous.

While I had thought that some students might indicate disagreement, even strong disagreement, that Aboriginal people hold these positive traits, I had not considered that they *all* would, with one exception—Matt. As stated a little earlier, Matt selected *unsure* in response to every trait, but that week, through my general interactions with the class, I observed him making derogatory comments about Aboriginal people. The responses from the students provide explicit insight into the students’ self-reported attitudes—but not a complete picture. I considered the possibility that Matt’s selection of *unsure* might have demonstrated some change since his earlier comment—that he was perhaps open to reconsidering his position.
Matt’s response reveals limitations of the Likert scale for these surveys. In addition, different students might have applied different meanings. Further, students might interpret the levels of agreement differently—two students might select *agree* but one might be agreeing more strongly than the other, but not strongly enough to select *strongly agree*. Selecting *unsure* might also mean different things to different students—some might select it because they feel disoriented at being directly asked what they think, and being uncertain if they had been observed demonstrating prejudice. Others might be reluctant to stereotype and be taking a stance to not judge another ethnic group—Aboriginal people in the context of this study—and yet others might have preconceptions that they may not want revealed.

However, despite the limitations of Likert scale surveys, the students’ responses to the traits provide an indication of their prior attitudes to Aboriginal people, complementing reflections on their initial thoughts and feelings. Their responses offer indications as to who or what they conceptualised ‘Aboriginal people’ to be, and later in this section and in subsequent chapters their deeper responses and reflections are explored in parallel to these indicative survey results.

After the program of learning had concluded, scores of 1 to 5 were applied to the levels of agreement for each student—*strongly disagree* = 1, *disagree* = 2, *unsure* = 3, *agree* = 4, and *strongly agree* = 5. Figure 4.1 shows the combined mean levels of agreement of all 47 students in both classes to the different traits describing Aboriginal people. The traits that were most disagreed to included approachable, patient, well-presented and advanced, whereas those that were most agreed to included interesting and resilient. Individual survey responses showed that some students were more inclined to select *disagree* or *strongly disagree* than others, and
some of these, including the two girls’ whose program reflections are drawn upon earlier—Gail and Emma—had indicated they had never previously interacted with Aboriginal people. The two girls selected *strongly disagree* for Aboriginal people having traits such as gentleness, responsibility, and generosity.

![Bar chart showing student's initial levels of agreement to traits of Aboriginal people](image)

**Key:**

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = unsure; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree

**Figure 4.1**  
Student's initial levels of agreement to traits of Aboriginal people
Overall, the students were much more inclined to select disagree than agree for Aboriginal people holding the positive traits listed in the survey. While survey (and also Surveys 2, 3 and 4) presented positive as well as negative traits describing Aboriginal people, the students’ mean responses to the negative traits correspond with their mean responses to the positive traits (i.e., overall if agree was selected in response to intelligent, disagree was selected in response to unintelligent), and for clarity of reporting I refer to the students’ levels of agreement to the positive traits.

There was resonance between students’ Survey 1 responses and some myths about Aboriginal people in Australian society. In selecting disagree and strongly disagree to the positive traits they did not consider the great diversity that resides among a group of people. They had indicated that they did not know more than a few Aboriginal people (if any), and further they did not consider that even if many people of another ethnicity are personally known, generalisations about all cannot be made. Their responses provided me some indication of their perspectives and feelings toward Aboriginal people. For instance, many students selected disagree and some strongly disagree for Aboriginal people as responsible and good parents, these traits need to reflect the traits of the survey accurately which resonates with myths and stereotypes circulated in social and media discourse about them being irresponsible parents, lazy and alcoholics, yet privileged (Mickler, 1998).

To complement Survey 1, Survey 2, which also required 5-point Likert scale responses, was used to gain insight into the students’ presumptions of an Aboriginal boy in comparison to their presumptions of a white non-Aboriginal boy. Both boys were unknown to the students, and they only had black and white photographs of each from which to determine how they perceived them. The photographs were
leading in some ways (see Figure 4.2), with the presentation and appearance of the Aboriginal boy very different to that of the non-Aboriginal boy.

Figure 4.2  Survey 2: Photos of the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal boy

Figure 4.3 shows that while the 47 students’ mean response to the traits of the non-Aboriginal boy was close to agree, midway between disagree and unsure was the mean for the same traits for the Aboriginal boy. The students agreed that the non-Aboriginal boy had traits such as approachable, gentle and kind, whereas they largely disagreed that the Aboriginal boy had those traits. The students made a particularly strong value judgement in relation to ‘cared for’, which they learned the week prior refers to being adequately looked after by one’s parents. Students presumed the non-Aboriginal boy was cared for, whereas they presumed the Aboriginal boy was not.
4.2 Moments of disorientation

The program of learning sought to understand what preconceptions of Aboriginal people the students might have held, and the literature had informed me as the researcher that negative preconceptions might well prevail, and, that addressing racism in education might well trigger some disorientation for the participating students. While there were numerous disorienting moments for the students—particularly during the first half of the program—a momentous one occurred on
completion of Survey 2, still in Lesson 1, when I revealed the identities of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal boys. The Aboriginal boy, who they had not considered to have held the positive traits, was Boyd Scully—a diligent and talented student and athlete who became a boxing champion and charity ambassador in adulthood, and who continues to assist young Australians in their sporting endeavours. The white non-Aboriginal boy was Martin Bryant, who demonstrated rebellion at a young age and later took the lives of 35 people—men, women and children—in a shooting spree in Port Arthur in Tasmania in 1996. As the identities and actions of the boys were revealed, I could see some effects of the disorientation that they were experiencing, initially evident in the surprised or shocked looks on their faces. This continued as they looked over their responses to Survey 2, and considered if their assumptions were accurate. No doubt in the school yard in their conversations with friends, and at home in their conversations with family they may well have had opportunity to further process the disorienting moment this initial confrontation to their perceptions contained. Later, at the end of the program, numerous students, including Yvonne, reflected on how Lesson 1 ‘shook’ her up in relation to how she personally judged not only Aboriginal people, but also people in general before knowing them:

When we looked at photographs of two different people of different skin colour, then wrote down what we thought these people were like before knowing them, a few of my biased thoughts crept into my responses. Finding out the identities of these two people, Boyd Scully and Martin Bryant, really shook me up about how I personally judge people before knowing them.

(Yvonne, Class A, 21 August 2009)
Preconceptions were further disoriented in ensuing lessons through learning that involved:

- awareness of Aboriginal people, cultures and experiences
- seeing similarities with Aboriginal people
- feeling moral indignation towards racism and injustice.

Although these moments of disorientation often merged and occurred simultaneously, each is explored separately, by drawing upon various responses and reflections made by students. Some facets of anti-racism education and disorienting dilemmas in TLT literature are drawn upon to explore each, commencing with how students developed their awareness of Aboriginal people, cultures and experiences.

4.2.1 Awareness of Aboriginal people, cultures and experiences

Numerous anti-racism educational studies among children, adolescents and adults have found that becoming aware of the cultures and experiences of other ethnic groups can be enough to unsettle or disorientate students’ prior beliefs. In the context of transformative learning, Foroughi, Irving and Savage (2010) found that as learners in their study became aware of social, cultural and political power relations, their perspectives toward ethnic minority groups were disoriented. Finnegan (2011, pp. 82–84) reports that learning about the enduring nature and impact of social inequalities on ethnic minority groups disorients learners’ beliefs about society and the recipients of inequalities.

In some ways like the learners in these studies, and with a similar effect, the students in this study learned about racism and social injustices experienced by another ethnic group—Aboriginal people. In some ways similar to what Foroughi, Irving and
Savage (2010) and Finnegan (2011) report in relation to adults learning about other ethnic groups, the students became more aware of the social injustices experienced by many Aboriginal people, and aware of the diversity and the richness of the cultures of Aboriginal people. As indicated in Section 1.2, the students had known very little about Aboriginal cultures, let alone the diversity in these cultures across Australia, or how some Aboriginal people and communities engage in traditional cultures more than others. The students indicated at the beginning of the program that they had only learned about small facets of Aboriginal cultures through listening to one or two Dreaming stories. However, as previously stated, such learning can be counter-productive in anti-racism initiatives, for as West (1999) points out, decontextualised Dreaming stories (when relevant aspects of Aboriginal cultures are not foregrounded first) often only compounds stereotypes and prejudices.

During Unit 3, many students were taken aback by learning for the first time about the current-day disadvantages faced by Aboriginal people at much higher rates than those of non-Aboriginal people. They were surprised in Unit 4 to learn about contemporary achievements and contributions to Australia by Aboriginal people. They had not previously known or considered that many of the social, educational, physical and financial opportunities they personally receive are not extended to Aboriginal people. This included Tiff:

Learning about all the disadvantages experienced today by a large number of Aboriginal people really made me stop and think about all the things in our everyday lives that we take for granted. (Tiff, Class B, 28 May 2010)
Tiff’s growing awareness of the oppression experienced and navigated by many Aboriginal people resulted in disorienting her beliefs about Australian society and the Aboriginal population.

For some students it was in earlier and more enjoyable learning moments that their preconceptions about Aboriginal people were disoriented. In Unit 1 the students marvelled at the way some Aboriginal children can speak several languages and were skilled hunters. Many of the girls indicated in their lesson reflections that they were most interested in learning about the closeness and collaboration of Aboriginal people and communities, and were captivated by the intricate basket weaving skills of Aboriginal girls and women in some communities. Many of the boys, on the other hand, were impressed by Aboriginal technologies and techniques for hunting animals. Reg and some of the other boys also enjoyed learning about other components of Aboriginal communities, including games and the ways children are taught how to make tracks, incorporating these aspects into their narratives:

We would have so much fun playing hide and seek, the bone game and many others. We ran down the steep sand hills, we were taught by mothers how to make tracks in the sand, and we told each other stories while sitting under a wiltja. (Reg, Class A, Narrative: The Wind, 18 August 2009)

Many of the students found meeting Stef, an Aboriginal cultural educator and a Ngarrindjeri elder from the Coorong region in SA, significant. This was in the final lesson of the program, and by then they had experienced disorientation at earlier moments in the program. In this lesson, Cindy was ‘amazed by what Aboriginals have gone through’:
When Stef came to our school and talked to us about Aboriginal culture, I was really amazed by what Aboriginals have gone through in their lifetimes. The things such as the stolen generation, massacres and disadvantages experienced, have made me change my perspective of Aboriginal Australians. (Cindy, Class B, 28 May 2010)

Meeting Stef was particularly significant for Helen, the only student in the class who identified as Aboriginal, and who, like Stef, is Ngarrindjeri. Like many of her classmates, Helen’s beliefs about Aboriginal people were influenced by social and media messages, and her Survey 1 and 2 responses revealed similar preconceptions as her classmates about Aboriginal people. She had also had minimal contact with other Aboriginal people, and did not engage in Aboriginal cultural practices. Also, similar to her peers, she had developed her understandings about Aboriginal people from conversations with acquaintances, listening to radio, and viewing television programs. Following the lesson, after the other students had left, I introduced Helen to Stef, and Stef kindly gave Helen a red, black and yellow bracelet—the colours of the Aboriginal flag. Stef told Helen to be proud of being Aboriginal. Helen later indicated that meeting and interacting with Stef, as well as some earlier lessons, were significant for her:

Watching the DVD documentary that she [Stef] brought helped me understand a bit more about my Aboriginal background and their way of life. I felt a lot of connection with her and the tribe during these certain lessons. (Helen, Class A, 21 August 2009)
4.2.2 Seeing similarities

Educators who report on the transformative experiences of learners detail the necessity of students to first experience disorienting moments comprising recognising similarities between themselves and people of different ethnic groups. From a TLT context, Wong et al. (2011, p. 498) report recognising resemblances between their own personal experiences and cultural practices, and those of diverse ethnic groups, disorients learners’ perspectives. One woman in their study (2011, p. 500) reflected ‘I began to sense that our very different pasts have more in common than we realised’.

Also, and like Newbery (2002, p. 195) observed among the primary school students in her classroom, the students in this study identified small facets of Aboriginal people, cultures and experiences to which they could relate. Recognising similarities between themselves and Aboriginal people, cultures and experiences disoriented the students’ perspectives in relation to them being different to themselves. Divisions between ‘us’ non-Aboriginal Australians and ‘them’ Aboriginal Australians became increasingly blurred in their minds and some reflected on this in their written responses and reflections. This was evident in Verma’s reflections:

But, as I found out in the lessons following, that they are very much the same as we are. During the lessons I slowly started to warm up to them, feeling a change of sympathy and a special acceptance and affection. (Verma, Class A, 21 August 2009)
The students also appreciated some historical and contemporary cultural activities that Aboriginal people engage in and enjoy that are similar to what they personally engage in and enjoy. The most notable of these was the game hide and seek, which they played at the local park as part of their excursion in Lesson 4. Playing the games brought a spark to the program, making it alive and exciting for the students. Many started to realise that there are some things, perhaps many, that they share with Aboriginal children, including a sense of fun and adventure, and closeness to friends and family.

There were several times when the students in my classes identified resemblances between some of their own social experiences and some of the experiences of Aboriginal people that they learned about. For several students, recalling how it felt to be lost in a shopping mall led them to begin to imagine how an Aboriginal child might have felt during and after being taken away from their family. The students, however, recognised that they could not fully understand circumstances of disadvantage experienced by a large proportion of the Aboriginal population past and present. Identifying and exploring even slight resemblances assisted many students to commence considering the impact of racial prejudice and discrimination on Aboriginal people and communities, and this nurtured their developing empathy.

Students showed a capacity to recognise they could not claim to be able to relate to most aspects of what they learned about—such as genocide against Aboriginal communities and the forceful removal of children from their families. However, they tried to imagine. Fiona compared how she thought she might have responded to being removed from her family with how the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* produced by Thomas and initially written by Pilkington (2002) depicted Aboriginal children:
If I were taken away from my parents I wouldn’t have been as tough and resilient as Molly, Daisy and Gracie. (Fiona, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Identifying the similarities, but more so the differences, led students to sympathise and empathise with Aboriginal people (these feelings and positions are elaborated on further in Chapters 7 and 8), sometimes leading to feeling moral indignation about the injustices.

4.2.3 Feeling moral indignation

Provoking feelings of moral indignation—or anger—towards social injustice, and particularly racism, can be a productive outcome of anti-racism education. For instance, in the context of transformative learning, Kellogg (2002) reports that their teaching and learning practice leads learners to demonstrate indignation towards injustices experienced by ethnic minorities, which then unsettles their views toward them. Wilner (2011) agrees that responding with indignation can be beneficial, but at other times it can be counterproductive, as responses of anger—even if towards injustice—can lead learners to experience withdrawal, contradiction and dysfunction, and also sometimes extremist views. Such possible outcomes also make Cranton (2004) uncertain and mindful of the place of anger or indignation in educational contexts.

Specifically in Units 2 and 3, many students responded with moral indignation towards past and present racism experienced by some Aboriginal Australians. This indignation and astonishment was further crystallised as they overlaid what they learnt and understood about various components of Aboriginal cultures with past and present experiences of injustice. They started to consider how these injustices might
be a result of stereotypes and prejudices held by other Australians toward Aboriginal people and their cultures. In Lesson 5, Unit 2, Charles and numerous of his peers were astounded by the resilience of Aboriginal children after being astonished to learn about the past events of genocide that followed the arrival of the British in Australia:

I was shocked that some people would try to exterminate the Aboriginal people. (Charles, Class A, Lesson 5 Reflection, 5 August 2009)

Craven (2013) similarly reports Australian students are shocked to learn about the history of race relations in Australia. Here also lies resonance with Cremin’s (2002) observations of her young students being saddened by the response to the stance of a young boy in India against the tyranny of sweatshops—a stance that shockingly resulted in his assassination. Cremin (2002) details how the students reconsidered their attitudes, and specifically their preconceptions, about Indian people upon learning about this and the positive traits and actions of the young boy. This process of reconsideration was also evident in Beth’s reflections on learning about genocide, which made her feel ‘upset’ and ‘disgusted’ about Australia’s history of genocide against Aboriginal people:

I felt upset about the massacre that had happened. I never knew about this before and I am disgusted. (Beth, Class B, Lesson 5 Reflection, 12 May 2010)

Many students also made connections between numerous past and present injustices encountered by Aboriginal people that the program introduced to them. For instance, the ongoing disadvantages in education, employment, health and housing learned about in Lesson 8 were considered to in part be the effect of the intergenerational
impact of the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families learned about in Lessons 6 and 7. In Lesson 10, some students connected myths and stereotypes about Aboriginal people—such as being unemployed (they learned that this is a myth or stereotype because many Aboriginal people reside in urban areas and have jobs), with prior learning—such as the levels of high unemployment in remote Aboriginal communities learned about in Lesson 8. These connections extended or enhanced their indignation about injustice as they understood the interconnecting web of past and present racism and disadvantage.

Learning about the injustices experienced by Aboriginal people was at odds with what they had known about Australian society. Their prior knowledge about historical and contemporary Australian society had been formed by their formal and informal learning inside and outside of school that was yet to incorporate past and present stark realities faced by the Aboriginal population, or Aboriginal perspectives toward these oppressions. Many of the students were quite surprised by learning about these components of the historical and contemporary aspects of Australian society, and this surprise often gave way to indignation. This moral indignation was often evident in their reflections on what they were learning about. As touched on earlier, Olivia and numerous of her classmates had initially resisted the new information presented to them—they could not believe that such inequalities could exist in a ‘fair’ and ‘developed’ nation like Australia. However, Olivia became increasingly open to what she and her classmates were learning about, and reflected on how she felt ‘angry’ towards racism and social disadvantage:

I do now see that most of it was true due to things I had heard and seen afterwards – it makes me so angry that anyone would want to be so horrible to
another human being just because they look different. Although I never really had any racist attitudes against other people my thoughts toward their treatment today and in the past have changed. (Olivia, Class A, 21 August 2009)

4.3 Summary and reflections

4.3.1 My dilemma

As I entered this study I was highly mindful of the sensitivities associated with students learning about the historical and contemporary injustices experienced by an ethnic minority group. I recognised that the students had most likely never heard about the injustices faced by Aboriginal people, and that learning about them would conflict with what they believed about Australian society being fair and just as depicted by social and media discourse—including in the national anthem *Advance Australia Fair*. I was aware that social media and public discourse invariably represents Aboriginal people as criminals, abusive, alcoholics and angry, while disregarding the good news stories, and that this had quite possibly shaped the students’ attitudes towards them. Somewhat predictably, the initial surveys identified the students’ explicit, self-reported attitudes toward Aboriginal people, which indeed revealed some explicit indication of their preconceptions of them, that affirmed a range of negative stereotypes.

Entering this study I was also mindful that students’ engagement in the program of learning may well result in them—on their own accord—recognising that these attitudes were possibly habitual ways of thinking about and feeling towards Aboriginal people. As the students learned about what racism is and the ways some
forms are still experienced today, some came to their own realisation of the nature of their initial attitudes; some students labelled these as prejudice.

Despite recognising the sensitivities and the difficulties for students in learning about Aboriginal Australians, that may well involve them becoming aware of their preconceptions about them, I was also aware that related disorientations are necessary. They are necessary due to the prevalence of misrepresentations of Aboriginal people in social and media discourses. And, sure enough, students indicated before conducting Surveys 1 and 2 that their understandings about Aboriginal people had been shaped by social and media discourse—predominantly by family, friends, television and radio. A more explicit rationale for the need for such teaching—despite the sensitivities—is that the teaching and learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures has been a component of Australian state and territory syllabi, and more recently a cross-curriculum priority in the Australian curriculum. Addressing racism within educational initiatives remains an often overlooked yet vital aspect to this field of learning. I, however, went beyond the scope of mainstream approaches in my choice of this objective to allow space for students to re-evaluate their attitudes toward Aboriginal people.

From my perspective, prior to, during and following facilitating the program of learning I really enjoyed teaching the students in this study. I highly valued, appreciated and liked the different personalities and learning preferences of each one, and attempted to accommodate their learning styles and preferences in my facilitation of the program. Before conducting this study I really did not know if the students held any preconceptions about Aboriginal people, and I think I did not want to know. I had known how political correctness in western societies places
expectations on people—including children and adolescents, to appear tolerant by not openly demonstrating racism. In some ways, I did not want the students to unearth and examine any implicit or discrete negative attitudes they might hold; as the teacher I did not want them to feel unsettled. At the same time I could see that the disorientation would be inevitable if I were to open these students to more detailed realities of Aboriginal experience. NASP (2005) explains that adherence to stereotypes and prejudices can commence outplaying as discriminatory behaviour, and I wanted the students to take a step towards becoming socially inclusive citizens in a similar fashion as explained by Citron (1969). It was my interest in the students’ wellbeing and my vision for a better society—particularly for Aboriginal Australians—that made me open to having the students’ experience disorientations.

This study was designed and conducted to answer questions, but it raised more. Due to the special curriculum contextual considerations I wanted to explore, I needed to design a program of learning from scratch, rather than drawing upon or replicating existing Aboriginal Studies or anti-racism educational lessons. The contexts included the need to facilitate learning about Aboriginal Australians as an anti-racism approach in regular middle school English lessons—and duplicating literary response types as research instruments for data analysis. The necessity of designing the program to capture these considerations in the context of the School was seen largely in their initial attitudes toward Aboriginal people. In some ways the photographs of the two boys in Survey 2 may have lead to or prompted their responses, but, regardless, the question remains why they had presumed negative traits about the Aboriginal boy in comparison to the non-Aboriginal boy after only viewing a single photograph of each. Other, more specific questions stem from this—why did they
think he was less clever or responsible—because he might not go to school? How would they know? Why would he be less fun-loving—wouldn’t playing outside with a wheelbarrow be fun? Why did they think he was less cared for—because he wasn’t wearing a top, or standing next to a grown up? These preconceptions about the Aboriginal boy are largely based on cultural determinants and preferences of what being clever, responsible, fun-loving and cared for involves—and assumptions and conceptualisation of who, or what, Aboriginal people are. A part of my dilemma was associated with being unsure regarding why they held these presumptions, and another part was related to my uncertainty in knowing their accuracy. Due to these presumptions being largely influenced by social and media discourse in Australian society, I think (as elaborated on in Chapter 9) there may be value in implementing similar learning in other Australian schools.

4.3.2 The usefulness of the program

Despite difficulties in ascertaining for sure the nature of the students’ initial preconceptions, it was clear that they did hold some negative views. Perhaps it could be claimed that the students were unfairly prompted by the two photographs as they responded to Survey 2, but before this they responded to Survey 1. With no images of, or messages about, Aboriginal people to possibly prompt their responses where they tended to disagree to many of the positive traits describing Aboriginal people. Preceding Survey 1, I had not taught them anything about Aboriginal people, or about prejudice or racism towards them, so they were not aware of my anti-racism stance. Rather, they indicated that they drew upon their understandings about them as observed from family, friends, television and radio—and also, possibly teachers and literature. Whereas each student had been influenced by different social and media
discourses, and in different ways, they proceeded to make their presumptions about Aboriginal people.

Allowing students freedom to come to their own conclusions required numerous learning environment, pedagogy, lesson content and literary response considerations. From the beginning of the program I made it very clear to the students that I was not going to assess them on their initial or changing thoughts and feelings toward Aboriginal people, but on English assessment criteria—including spelling, grammar, sentence and paragraph structure, and critical thinking and creativity. So that their peers and I would not influence their responses, lesson and program reflections and the literary responses were produced individually, and they were informed that the only ‘right’ response was an open and honest response. The critical and creative literary responses the students were able to produce also provided freedom to consolidate and articulate their perspectives and feelings about Aboriginal people, cultures and experiences.

Some practical examples of TLT studies in which adult learners navigate disorienting dilemmas throughout their critical discourse and engagement in critical reflection provided me with a useful platform from which to commence exploring the disorientations the students experience in this study—particularly in Lesson 1. Simply being asked in Survey 1 what traits they perceived Aboriginal people to have and what traits the Aboriginal boy has in Survey 2 provided a degree of disorientation. It was disorienting because these had been hidden to them—implicit and subconscious—and exposing them is considered socially and politically taboo. Dirkx (2011) explains that this is similarly the case for adult learners. What was more disorienting to them was learning the identity of the non-Aboriginal boy—
convicted criminal Martin Bryant, who they had presumed held more favourable traits than the Aboriginal boy—sporting legend and charity ambassador Boyd Scully. Students started asking themselves *why did I assume the Aboriginal boy and Aboriginal people in general are less clever, responsible, fun-loving, cared for?* Even at this early stage, it appeared that many students began to identify for themselves that they held various unfavourable preconceptions about Aboriginal people, and that perhaps they shouldn’t. The disorientation involved some of them starting to challenge their perspectives on Aboriginal people, but also their very ways of thinking about—or presuming things about—people who are ethnically or culturally different. This involved them realising that they are in charge of their own perspectives—not their parents, teachers, friends, celebrities or anyone else. The students began to recognise that it is a person’s values and actions that are important, not their ethnicity.

Throughout ensuing lessons many students continued to contemplate why they had made negative presumptions about Aboriginal people—their new discourse explored further in Chapter 5. Becoming aware of Aboriginal people, cultures and social experiences—particularly of injustice, disoriented their view of fairness and Australian society. Learning about the resilience and determination of Aboriginal people amidst racism disoriented many of their preconceptions. Also, identifying similarities between Aboriginal cultures and experiences and their own disoriented the divisions they had constructed between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Feeling moral indignation towards racism and injustice also further disoriented some students’ former understandings throughout their engagement in the new discourse.
Chapter 5 A new discourse
Unfortunately, we often only hear the negative stories about Aboriginal people and communities, and not many positive stories, which in turn transforms [sic] society’s outlook on different people groups. (Cindy, Exposition. Class B, 26 May 2010)

The students engaged in, what was for them, a new discourse that included positive representations of Aboriginal people. The initial disorienting stimulus of completing the surveys and then reviewing their responses in Lesson 1 commenced the program, throughout which some components Aboriginal cultures and experiences were introduced to them. The program presented positive images and messages about Aboriginal people—representations to contrast the misrepresentations of Aboriginal people often present in social and media discourse, that had shaped the students’ preconceptions of Aboriginal people (elaborated on in Chapter 4). Christensen (2007) explains that from a very young age children learn that white people are heroes and royalty and non-whites are side-kicks and even imbeciles due to depictions in books, television programs, poems and films. The program content implicitly incorporated the positive traits about Aboriginal people listed in Survey 1 and 2, to have students start to consider and weigh the discourse, towards perhaps altering their attitudes toward them (explored in Chapter 6).

The students’ engagement in this program was intended to have them critically think about Australian society and some inequities experienced by Aboriginal people. It was also intended to allow students to examine their preconceptions about Aboriginal people, that had been largely hidden to them prior to Surveys 1 and 2. Derman-Sparks and Phillips (2000, pp. 15–16) explain that racism in Australia today is often not observable, but unseen, shaping the behaviours of some people, resulting in the
social exclusion and disadvantage of other ethnic groups. The students’ reflections flowed from the disorientations experienced early on in the program. The students who experienced disorientation late or not at all were often disengaged from the program. Disorienting dilemmas act as a ‘crossroad’, or ‘pedagogical entry point’, at which learners determine their engagement or lack thereof in critical discourse, towards perhaps experiencing a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000). Feeling fear or uncertainty are key feelings at the initial stages of transformative learning produced by disorienting dilemmas and self-examination (King, 2011, p. 92). By navigating beyond this uncertainty, students can proceed to experience critical discourse, which according to Mezirow (1997), involves independently engaging with new information and weighing it against prior understandings. Such engagement readily involves learners critically reflecting on their personal experiences, assumptions and beliefs (Croton, 2004; Gliszinski, 2007; Kilgore & Bloom, 2002). The depth of learners’ engagement in transformative learning is largely determined by their willingness to critically reflect on their former understandings (Jarvis, 2003; Lange, 2004; Mezirow, 2000), and by their cognitive capacity and maturity (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). The central role of the deeper emotional and spiritual dimensions of transformative learning is underdeveloped and requires further exploration.

As stated previously, this study recognises that TLT is an adult learning theory, and adolescents may not have the cognitive capacity and maturity of most adults. Adolescents, generally, may not have yet developed their moral consciousness to the same extent as adults (Colby et al., 1983; Walker, 1989), yet it becomes clear in this chapter that students engaged in critical thinking and reflection that share some
commonalities with critical discourse and reflection as framed in TLT. As critical
discourse is an adult learning concept, and because the students’ discourse was not always ‘critical’, I only refer to some moments in their engagement with the program that comprises critical thinking. Critical thinking was reviewed in Section 2.2.2 as comprising students becoming well informed; judging the credibility of sources; identifying conclusions, reasons, and assumptions; and judging the quality of an argument (Ennis, 2002, p. 1). These pockets of critical thinking occurred (and are explored) alongside appreciative, empathetic and reflective learning experiences. In some ways this is similar to the critical thinking and reflectivity of child and adolescent students in learning about social injustices as reported on by other educators, including Bigelow (2007a), Fleishman (2007), Kabongo (2000), Kissinger (2007) and Parenti (2002) (reviewed in Section 2.2).

This chapter explores the new discourse that the students engaged in, in which their engagement in critical thinking and reflection were synonymous—their critical thinking evident in their reflections on the discourse. It explores the extent they were able to look ‘beyond surface meanings, impressions, myths, clichés and opinions’ (Shor, 1992, p. 290)—particularly in relation to historical and contemporary discourse about Aboriginal people. It seeks to listen to the questions that the students continued asking themselves, including why many Aboriginal people are treated the way they are, and why they themselves are spared from the same social injustices.

I first sequentially explore the students’ critical and creative engagement in the discourse, in which the program—and also they—challenged their former understandings about Aboriginal people and Australian society. I explore some of their new understandings (without exploring any alterations of attitudes—which are
explored in Chapter 6), but also the resistance to the learning from some students, due to being bored or not believing some components of the new discourse. Opposition came from some parents, and in response some School staff were unsupportive. I not only explore the value but also the implications of teaching and learning about Aboriginal cultures and histories in a school environment where some staff and families are not supportive of such curriculum inclusions.

5.1 Challenging former understandings

The students were presented with numerous new things about Aboriginal people, their past and present cultures, and experiences that they had never heard about, let alone considered before. These new understandings challenged their former understandings (or what they had thought they understood) about their society and the Indigenous population. This chapter explores how their former understandings were challenged, and how at times they challenged their own understandings.

Following the initial disorientation of many of the students’ understandings of and attitudes toward Aboriginal people in Lesson 1, they engaged in a sequenced program of learning. The chronologically ordered learning journey took them from learning about some aspects of traditional Aboriginal cultures, to past injustices, present day disadvantages and discrimination, and contemporary achievements.

In Unit 1, the students engaged in learning about new aspects of Aboriginal community life and culture that depicted them in ways synonymous to the traits in the surveys. They learned some basic components of history that they had not known. From increasing their knowledge about Aboriginal hunting, gathering and culinary expertise, as well as other cultural components of some Aboriginal
communities, their prior preconceptions were disoriented. They learned basic components about Australian history that they did not know about, including that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are Australians—the first Australians—who lived on the continent before the arrival of the British. Immersing in viewing photographs and documentaries depicting Aboriginal children engaging in cultural practices, followed by playing Aboriginal games at the local park, contrasted ensuing lessons in Unit 2, which involved them starting to learn about past oppressive experiences that followed colonisation.

Learning about colonisation and the events following it was disorienting for the students, who had never been told about the genocide of many Aboriginal people and entire communities. It resulted in them starting to take a critical look at Australian history. In Lesson 5 students viewed the following excerpt as presented by Craven (2011, p. 53):

One evening in June 1838 a gang of stockmen rode onto Myall Creek Station in northern New South Wales, roped together at gunpoint 28 ‘friendly’ Aboriginal people, mainly women and children, who were camped there, then took them into the bush and killed them, returning the next morning to burn the bodies. This was part of what one newspaper described as a drive to ‘exterminate all the race of blacks in that quarter’, including a massacre of 200 at Slaughterhouse Creek. That followed a three month campaign by Major Nunn and the redcoats in response to an appeal by squatters for government protection against an Aboriginal ‘uprising’. Nunn claimed to have shot every Aborigine he saw and encouraged local stockmen to carry on with the job when he left the district.
The students learned that the events at Myall Creek Station and Slaughterhouse Creek were just two of many incidents of genocide. Learning about these past atrocities, as well as ongoing discrimination in later lessons, aimed at having them start thinking about some of the ways Aboriginal people, families and communities have been, and continue to be, effected by historical acts of violence.

Similarly, Lessons 6 and 7 involved the students considering the ongoing impact on Aboriginal families and communities of Australian state and territory government policies that enabled the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families from the 1920s to the 1970s (see the plan for Lesson 6 and also Lesson 8 in Appendix 1). As students viewed the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* in Lesson 6, many critically thought about and reflected on their feelings toward the injustice experienced by Aboriginal children and their families upon being separated from each other. The students learned about Nungala Fejo, whose forcible removal was included in the Apology to by the Australian Government (2008) to her and other members of the Stolen Generations and their descendants. In the Apology ‘the love and the warmth and the kinship’ of Aboriginal community life was contrasted to the ‘coming of the welfare men’:

Nungala Fejo was born in the late 1920s. She remembers her earliest childhood days living with her family and her community in a bush camp just outside Tennant Creek. She remembers the love and the warmth and the kinship of those days long ago, including traditional dancing around the camp fire at night. She loved the dancing … But then, sometime around 1932, when she was about four, she remembers the coming of the welfare men. Her family had feared that day and had dug holes in the creek bank where the children could
run and hide. What they had not expected was that the white welfare men did not come alone. They brought a truck. They brought two white men and an Aboriginal stockman on horseback cracking his stockwhip. The kids were found; they ran for their mothers, screaming, but they could not get away. They were herded and piled onto the back of the truck. Tears flowing, her mum tried clinging to the sides of the truck as her children were taken away to the Bungalow in Alice, all in the name of protection (Australian Government, 2008).

In these lessons, and in ensuing lessons in Unit 3 as the students learned about contemporary disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people, they started to see that not all Aboriginal people experienced or experience forms of racism and disadvantage. The students explored various ways different Aboriginal people live today, the major issues affecting them, and the social disparity they experience compared to other Australians.

The first lesson of Unit 3—Lesson 8—involved the students critically thinking about Australian society and possible institutional racism as they questioned why one-third of Aboriginal youth compared to one-sixth of non-Aboriginal youth do not make it into Year 9 at school (ABS, 2005). They considered the reasons suggested by Aboriginal parents in remote communities, relating to remoteness, language and culture, as well as prejudice and discrimination from school staff, and a consequent lack of trust of schools (FaHCSIA, 2010, 2011, 2012). As they learned about the cyclic oppression experienced by many Aboriginal people (education outcomes impacting employment outcomes and in turn housing and health outcomes) many were able to recognise the reality of white privilege in Australian society. Many
students asked themselves why they do not experience low outcomes in education, employment, health, housing and life expectancy to the same extent as the Aboriginal population—particularly remote Aboriginal communities. They made connections between the different forms of disadvantage, such as low retention rates at school and high unemployment levels, and the widening inequality of housing and health between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Tiff was one student who critically thought about racism and race-related disadvantage, and connected learning from one lesson to another:

In Lesson 8, where we talked about the wheel of oppression, I was stunned at the really low figures found in housing and education [sic]. When we talked about the number of Aboriginals who are unemployed it made me realise that a lot of this was due to racism. Tanya came to our school and explained to us the effects of racism and how it emotionally destroys people inside. I was unaware of these types of workplace bullying, and now I am strongly against it. (Tiff, Class B, 28 May 2010).

Some students, like Gail, linked this to what Tanya spoke about in Lesson 9 during her visit to the class. As they learned about the cyclic oppression experienced by many Aboriginal people (education outcomes impacting employment outcomes and in turn housing and health outcomes) many were able to recognise the reality of white privilege in Australian society.

Learning about contemporary racism and disadvantage, and the large gap in housing, health, education and employment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians was new information to the students. Olivia and Rosa in Class A spoke to me of their disbelief of the information I presented about the social inequalities
experienced by the Aboriginal population. I encouraged them to do their own research on the topic, which might include speaking to their parents about it. The next day they informed me that their parents had informed them that the disadvantages they were learning about were true. These girls persisted in exploring the issues even when they were challenging for them to consider and accept.

The myths about Aboriginal people in Lesson 10, and news reporting that is potentially biased in Lesson 11, was also new to the students, and often resulted in deeper critical thinking about Australian society. Learning about misrepresentations of Aboriginal people in news reporting (similarly their under-representation in good news stories in Lesson 12) challenged the students to consider the impact of biased news reporting. Louise reflected that she was starting to feel sympathy and compassion towards Aboriginal people, particularly as she learnt about their misrepresentations in news reports:

I found it hard when we reflected on if news reports are unfair and biased. I found it sad and mean for them to make up stories that weren't true about the Aboriginals [sic]. I enjoyed Rabbit Proof Fence it was very interesting but it hurt to see the kids get taken away from their parents. I felt a lot of sympathy and compassion for the families that were split up. (Louise, Class A, 21 August 2009)

The students’ engagement with this program challenged their former understandings, and they learnt to negotiate feelings of outrage and other unsettling feelings, and responded with empathy. The overt status of feelings in racism education shares semblance with SEL outcomes (explored in greater detail in Chapters 7 and 8). This learning and its outcomes in the first 15 lessons in Units 1–4 prepared them to meet
Stef in Lesson 16, and to listen to the cultures and experiences she shared with them with respect and appreciation. Stef talked about some components of her Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices, including in relation to Aboriginal people maintaining traditional ways of greeting each other on the street, and her perspectives on the impact of global warming on the Coorong, which brought their engagement in the new discourse to a summit.

Throughout the program students developed their ability to critically think about and reflect on the realities of Aboriginal people in Australian society—to deliberate on what happened to Aboriginal people, who did these things to them, why they did these things to them, and what impact actions may have had on them. Students also reflected on what can be done to stop racism and related disadvantage. Paramount in the English classes was the students’ engagement in producing critical and creative literary responses in the forms of reflections, narratives and expositions. These literary responses provided opportunity for having the students consolidate and creatively articulate their new learning throughout the discourse.

In their program and lesson reflections many students wrote about what challenged and stirred them as they learned about the injustices experienced by Aboriginal people, and how they increased their support for social justice. In his program reflections, Charles sought balance in his understanding:

> In the past term I have learnt many wonderful things that Aboriginal people have done for our community, and also the bad things that have happened to Indigenous people in their community. (Charles, Class A, 21 August 2009)
Many other students showed their ability to recognise Aboriginal people’s positive traits and contributions to Australian society amidst the experience of social oppressions through their discourses; leading them to see Aboriginal people more positively (elaborated on in Chapter 6).

Narrative writing helped the students’ consolidate and articulate their developing understanding. Writing their narratives sequentially, adding a paragraph at the close of many of the lessons, assisted them to reflect on their new thoughts and feelings and to incorporate these in their stories. Attempting to take the perspective of an Aboriginal person in their story writing—whilst recognising they cannot fully do so as they cannot relate to the extent of the disadvantage and discrimination experienced—assisted students to empathise with the impact of racism on Aboriginal people (elaborated on in Chapter 7). Adding a paragraph to their narratives at the close of the lessons or for homework assisted them to make their stories flow and make sense. They considered the experiences and perspectives about Aboriginal people in an attempt to accurately tell their story, and many students incorporated critical thinking about the past and present social injustices in Australian society into these creative and imaginative pieces of writing. Among these students was Robert, who wrote from the imagined perspective of an Aboriginal elder to incorporate his own thoughts about Aboriginal people not being classed Australian citizens:

We love this country as much as the next person. We fought in both of the world wars for Australia but we get nothing for that because Aboriginal people back then were not classed as Australian citizens which disappoints me because our ancestors were on this land before these people were even born.

(Robert, Class B, Narrative: My People, 28 May 2010)
The students’ exposition writing was another channel through which they continued thinking critically about Australian society. In responses to the lessons in Units 3 and 4 the students imagined the viewpoint of an Aboriginal people as though they were reflecting on the disadvantages learned about in class. Cindy showed concern:

I also worry about the health figures these days. It seems like more and more Aboriginal people have health problems. When I think about all the Aboriginals that have heart diseases it puts me in agony. For instance, my mother, a very unique and wonderful woman, passed away at the age of 30. Heart disease was the main cause of her death. She had suffered greatly over many years. However, she never complained once. My mother was strong and resilient. She lived a full life of never ending joys [sic]. (Faith, Class B, Exposition: My People, 26 May 2010)

5.2 Developing new understandings

The new things I’ve learnt are that not everything you hear about Aboriginal people in newspapers, TV, magazines or the radio are true. (Kris, Class B, 28 May 2010)

A number of key understandings emerged from the students’ engagement in the new discourse. Although I only introduced them to a few concepts and events in relation to past and present cultures and injustices, I found that these greatly increased their understanding of Aboriginal people. Although they knew next to nothing about Aboriginal people they indicated in their initial survey responses they perceived them unfavourably. They had not been aware of the diversity that exists in Aboriginal Australia—that no two people or communities, of any ethnic group, are the same.
Every lesson in the program provided the students with first-time discoveries. Only a few students had previously learned about or viewed components of the program (e.g., Louise had viewed *Rabbit-Proof Fence* in the year prior at a different school). This section explores the types of new understandings that students developed, commencing with learning about historical and contemporary racism and disadvantage. As their understandings of the experiences of Aboriginal people developed, so too did they begin to appreciate the diversity in Aboriginal Australia, and realise that generalisations about Aboriginal people cannot, and should not, be made. Many of the students had entered the program apprehensive about what they would be learning about. This section shows that, as they reflected on their new understanding of learning about Aboriginal people, they did not find it boring, but rather, somewhat vibrant. It explores how these new understandings started to developing, commencing with their growing concern about historical racism.

### 5.2.1 Historical racism

Prior to the program, the students in this study had not known much about racism per se, let alone the historical or contemporary racism experienced by Aboriginal people. This program intended to introduce them to some components of the cultures and social experiences of Aboriginal people, including racism, with a view to challenging what I surmised might be negative attitudes toward Aboriginal people.

In Lesson 6, while watching *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, the students observed the term ‘half-caste’ being used by the Western Australia ‘protector of aborigines’ to determine which children were light enough to be removed from their parents and adopted into the homes of white Australians. At this point I paused the film, and explained that the term refers to a ‘middle positioning’ between being white (equated
by some Australians to being superior) and being black (perceived as inferior)—

hence lighter children were deemed acceptable for assimilation, while darker
children stayed at the missions. While viewing the film students responded with
moral indignation (explored in more detail in Section 4.2.3) and empathy (explored
in more detail in Chapter 8). Like many of her peers, Fiona’s growing awareness and
sympathy was shown in her writing:

Watching the mother’s cry and plead as their children were taken away was
really upsetting. While watching that scene it made me realise and feel grateful
to have a mother and father who are always there for me and who care about
me … If I were taken away from my parents I wouldn’t have been as tough and
resilient as Molly, Daisy and Gracie. (Fiona, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Along with this sympathy came an understanding of the historical social injustices
experienced by Aboriginal people, and an appreciation of their resilience in response
to these injustices—as well as of contemporary racism.

5.2.2 Contemporary racism

Immediately before the program commenced the students indicated they had laughed
at, and sometimes told, jokes about Aboriginal people, and had believed the myths
and stereotypes about them that they had heard. However, to a large extent they had
not considered what racism is, let alone its effect on recipients. Nor had they
considered that personally perceiving them unfavourably may result in them
contributing to and supporting or maintaining the societal, institutional, systemic
racism that categorise Aboriginal people that Paradies and Cunningham (2009)
explain excludes them from social opportunities and maintains discrimination and
disadvantage. I did not explicitly state this to the students, but throughout the program many came to these understandings, in their own words, for themselves.

Unit 3 assisted students to explore the realities, expressions and impacts of racism. This included when they considered the possibility that news reporting can be biased by misrepresenting and making generalisations about Aboriginal Australians. Numerous students, including Louise and Cindy, struggled with news stories and headlines that depicted a whole community, or even ‘blacks’ or ‘Aboriginals’ in general as bad:

I found it hard when we reflected on if news reports are unfair and biased.

(Louise, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Unfortunately we often only hear the negative stories about Aboriginal people and communities, and not many positive stories, which in turn transforms [sic] society’s outlook on different people groups. (Cindy, Class B, 28 May 2010)

Students also developed a greater understanding of contemporary racism as they listened to Tanya share her experience of and responses to racism as an African-Australian (Lesson 9). I wanted the students to learn more about Aboriginal people and appreciate the effects of disrespect and prejudice before interacting with an Aboriginal elder—Stef—in the final lesson of the program. Listening to Tanya’s stories of racism and asking her questions about these experiences resulted in them identifying the impact of racism, and to link these to forms of racism experienced by Aboriginal Australians. The students were surprised as they listened to Tanya share her experiences of racism, such as when she was told by the management of a nursing home where she was working at the time that black people were not allowed
to care for a resident. Tanya informed them how she felt in response to this, and also in response to a neighbour and friend who questioned her as to why her baby is small, and whether it is because African children are malnourished and underdeveloped. In response to this lesson some students took the initiative to consider if any of their preconceptions about Aboriginal people—which they had become aware of upon reflecting on their Survey 1 and 2 responses—might have an adverse impact on Aboriginal people if they used those preconceptions to inform their speech and behaviour towards Aboriginal people.

5.2.3 Contemporary disadvantage

Lesson 8 assisted students to develop a greater knowledge of the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people today, and that it can be difficult to ascertain the reasons for this disadvantage. I presented information about the intergenerational nature of trajectories from low health to education to employment to housing to worse health to high contact with the justice system to low life expectancy. Open questions allowed students to come to their own understandings of the impact and, perhaps, the causes of these disadvantages. Examples of open question included ‘why might many Aboriginal people experiences these circumstances?’ and ‘how might you feel if you experienced these injustices?’ While disadvantage can be a result of prejudice and discrimination towards Aboriginal people by other Australians and Australian institutions, students came to understand it can occur in relation to living remotely (difficult in accessing goods and services) (FaHCSIA, 2012).

These new understandings were often not easy for the students to come to—as they conflicted what they knew, or thought they knew, about equality, justice and fairness
in Australia—the ‘lucky country’—where all Australians have equal opportunity. In some ways the fact that some of the students had not previously perceived Aboriginal people as Australians but as migrants complemented this—as perhaps they had assumed that equality, justice and fairness need not be extended to them. I stated earlier in Section 4.2.3 that Olivia and Rosa were incredulous at the information about Aboriginal people presented in this lesson. However, like others in her class, Olivia later reflected that she found the lessons valuable:

This term has been an interesting and helpful experience. It has been helpful to really get an insight of what Aboriginal people have been through and are going through. (Olivia, Class A, 21 August 2009)

5.2.4 Diversity in Aboriginal Australia

The program provided the students opportunity—often their first—to understand that while some Aboriginal people live in remote communities, others live in major cities, and while some adhere strongly to traditional cultures, others do not. They understood that there is no ‘typical’ Aboriginal person, just as there is no ‘typical’ Australian, and two Aboriginal people living in the same community will have similarities to as well as differences from each other. This understanding led many students to challenge the stereotypes of Aboriginal people they held.

As they began to see the diversity across Australia, even in one Aboriginal community or family, many students appreciated that generalisations about Aboriginal people can be erroneous. On their own accord, and in their own way, many understood that yes, while there might be some Aboriginal people—like any
people—who may demonstrate negative behaviours (in the context of the students’ perceptions), there are many outstanding Aboriginal people who have contributed greatly to their family, community and wider society. Learning about the attributes and actions of some Aboriginal people and communities enabled students to think again about their understandings. Gail reflected on her presumptions:

When we started this segment in English this term I had quite a few negative ideas and emotions toward Indigenous Australians. (Gail, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Many students wanted to know more about individual Aboriginal people and communities, in order to better their understanding and were stimulated by this course. This included Pippa, who summed up at the end of the program:

This term really helped me change my thoughts about Aboriginals. At the start I thought ‘how boring’ until I got into the lessons. (Pippa, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Fiona had at first assumed that the lessons were going to be dull, but soon found herself increasingly engaging in them:

Before when Mr Heaton told us about how we were gonna [sic] learn about racism I thought to myself ‘this is going to be so boring’ and I didn't know it was going to be interesting. (Fiona, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Students’ interest and engagement in the program began to increase in Lessons 3 and 4, held at the local park. At the park, students enjoyed playing the games and sharing a party meal. Learning that the games and the party meals resemble aspects of past
and present Aboriginal cultures started them thinking that perhaps Aboriginal people and their cultures are more interesting than they had at first believed.

As Unit 2 commenced, still at the local park, looking around at the trees and the creek to imagine some of the social experiences of Aboriginal people and communities associated with the events of genocide following the arrival of the British, many students came to understand that the new topic was far from disinteresting. Their interest continued into the next lesson as they watched *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and learned about the experiences of Molly, Daisy and Gracie, who were close to the same age as them. However, not all the students openly engaged with the new discourse, as discussed in the following section.

### 5.3 Some resistance from some students

As in many a classroom, a few students here retained their initial boredom and apathy, and resisted the new learning that the majority of the students engaged in. As elaborated on in Section 2.2.2, there can be resistance among Australians—including teachers—to appreciating Aboriginal histories and cultures. This resistance follows attempts by state and territory governments, including DETE (2001) in South Australia, to alter what students learn at school. Teachers and schools maintain autonomy over what they teach, and teachers often do not want to or may feel unable to teach about Aboriginal Australians (Craven, 2013; West, 1999), and teachers, like others in society, have often formed negative opinions about Aboriginal people (Craven, 2013). As elaborated on more fully in Section 2.1.2, the negative opinions that children may develop, even in the early years (Tenorio, 2006; Christensen, 2007), are not likely to have a chance of being altered in an environment where the
facilitators of their learning hold negative opinions, do not want or feel unable to teach about Aboriginal people.

A few of the students in this study had difficulty believing the new information that was presented. This resistance led me to modify some lessons, especially for Class B.

Several students demonstrated boredom and disinterest through their body and verbal language when reflecting on lessons and in between lessons. Some also perceived particular lessons as irrelevant or tedious. For instance, Matt, in his Lesson 6 reflection, expressed his view that watching *Rabbit-Proof Fence* was too much after they had learned about the events of genocide in Lesson 5:

Lesson number 6 the movie ‘the Rabbit Proof Fence’ - I think went just a little too far after the lesson before that were all about the genocide and the massacres and killing *[sic]*. (Matt, Class A, 21 August 2009)

According to Matt in his proceeding reflections, neither did he find ensuing lessons interesting or helpful in increasing his understanding of Aboriginal people. The discomfort was perhaps too much. In Section 4.1 it was stated that Matt had selected unsure in response to all the traits describing Aboriginal people in Surveys 1, 2, 3 (immediately after the program) and 4 (six months after the program). However, he had made negative comments about Aboriginal people to his classmates a few days after Lesson 1. My overall impression of Matt’s learning experience was that from the outset and throughout the learning experience he was disengaged and disinterested in what he was learning about, and like several others of his classmates, he would prefer the program to conclude sooner rather than later. He did not
encounter any separation—or what Jarvis (2011) calls disjuncture—between his old and new perspectives (elaborated on further in Section 6.2).

Some students found it difficult to believe what they were learning about in relation to the social disadvantages experienced by many Aboriginal people today. Some did not (and possibly did not want to) comprehend that the advantages and opportunities extended to themselves might not be available to others in society, including Aboriginal people. Olivia voiced in class her view that the disadvantages experienced of Aboriginal people is the fault of Aboriginal people, and perhaps others had the same thought but did not openly express it. Olivia and some of her peers told me after Lesson 8 that they believed everyone can determine their own circumstances. Rosa stated ‘they [Aboriginal people] bring it [poverty] upon themselves’. As Mickler (1998) suggests is common in Australian society (elaborated on in Section 2.1.1), some students voiced their perspective that Aboriginal people are more privileged than non-Aboriginal people due to welfare benefits the government extends to the Aboriginal population. In my own personal reflections I wondered whether their response reflected their mistrust of what I taught them (for after all I had been presenting some challenging information about Aboriginal people and Australian society). However, at the close of the program, upon reflecting on her new understandings, Olivia appeared to see need for some responsibility:

At the start of the term I had a fairly negative attitude to the things we were learning about. Not because I was racist or didn’t like Aboriginal people, but because I didn’t want to believe or accept that my ancestors had done such horrible things. (Olivia, Class A, 21 August 2009)
This new understanding reveals her engagement in the discourse—she was grappling with what she was learning in Units 2 and 3. She and others engaged in a process of considering and weighing the new information pertaining to how their society, nation and the generations before them had committed numerous atrocities that are still heavily affecting the lives of Aboriginal people. This was a difficult, significant, and sophisticated step in the context of the learning of a group of Year 8 students, and some did not get to this point.

Some students did not come to a new understanding, or denied that they had held preconceptions toward Aboriginal people, despite selecting disagree and strongly disagree in relation to Aboriginal people holding the positive traits listed in Surveys 1 and 2. I wondered if these students did not perceive their survey responses as comprising preconceptions. Or, perhaps the surveys were not an accurate measure, and students had not thought or felt adversely towards Aboriginal people. Olivia, for instance, despite recognising that she had held negative attitudes toward what she was learning about, reflected (above) that she did not hold negative thoughts toward or about Aboriginal people themselves. This was despite having selected disagree and strongly disagree for the range of traits listed in Survey 1, and having done the same in response to the Aboriginal boy in Survey 2. She was not alone—other students could not recognise, or could not admit to, holding a dislike of Aboriginal people, but despite that, often took other steps to learn more about them and Australian society.

Most of the students indicated some new learning. Of course there were some lessons they enjoyed more than others, and several indicated that they did not like some at all. Louise found that most of the lessons—all of those in Units 2, 3 and 4, were ‘a
bit annoying’, and she had learned about these things in previous years at a different school:

But all of the rest (of the lessons) didn’t get to me it stared [sic] to be a bit annoying. Sorry but at [my] old school I had learnt lots of this in year 7 and 5.

(Louise, Class A, 21 August 2009)

On the other hand, like most of her classmates, Cindy concluded that the program was beneficial and enjoyable, and in light of this indicated that one or two lessons were not as useful to progressing their learning. Cindy specifically identified reviewing the Apology (Government of Australia, 2008) in Lesson 7 as a distraction from the learning experience that she was deeply engaged in. They had been engrossed in learning about the history of Aboriginal people in Lessons 5 and 6, and prior to that in Unit 1 when reviewing various cultural practices, indicating that the Apology in Lesson 7 interrupted the chronological flow of this learning:

It was good to read the speech and to know what it meant, but it wasn’t really a lesson that we could build on while writing the narrative. It didn’t really fit in with the topic. (Cindy, Class B, 28 May 2010)

She and others had wanted to spend more time learning more about the Aboriginal story of community-based cultures in Unit 1 and past inequalities that Lessons 5 and 6 introduced to them, rather than making the leap to consider if they agreed with and supported the Apology presented by the Australian Government (2008). I recognised that such responses from Olivia and others did not reveal a negative attitude towards the program, but the opposite—an engrossment in previous and ensuing lessons. However, I also considered whether their dislike of the lesson might also be due to
the Apology still being fresh in the minds of many Australians, including perhaps their family members—many Australians do not support reconciliation initiatives (Craven, 2011).

5.4 Some opposition from some parents and colleagues

This resistance from some students to the program of learning, and also the resistance observed among some parents and several of my colleagues, is despite what should have been improvements in the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in Australian schools. Elaborated on in Section 2.2.2 is the rights of Indigenous peoples laid out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP, 2006). These rights include Indigenous peoples telling their histories and cultures (Article 13), controlling their education (Article 14) and maintaining the ‘dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations’ (UN DRIP, 2006, p. 7). The challenge for high quality teaching, that might challenge students to reconsider their opinions of Aboriginal people, is set by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2014) in the second of its seven standards in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. According to Standard 2.4, teachers should aspire to proficiently provide opportunities for ‘students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages’, and support colleagues with providing opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.
Perhaps the resistance to the program of learning by some students, or the new understandings about historical and contemporary disadvantages of Aboriginal Australians that they started to develop, or both, led some parents to oppose the program. As mentioned in Section 5.3 and prior to that in Section 2.2.2, there is at times resistance among Australians to appreciating Aboriginal histories and cultures. Complaints from these parents resulted in a lack of support from some of my colleagues—including the School principal and my employment supervisor. After great deliberation, I have opted to add to the discussion engaged in by numerous other researchers and educators who have detailed the opposition and lack of support from parents and school administrations to multiculturalism and anti-racism programs of learning. York (2003), for instance, explains that opposition from parents and also teachers, can be due to many specifically denying children can be racist, and sometimes also holding their own personal prejudices.

I found that a few parents did not want their children learning about Aboriginal people and especially the injustices they have experienced and continue to experience. As the program content was new to the students, and contrasted with populist discourses about Aboriginal people that I have observed, and that Gale (2005), Mickler (1998) and others report is prevalent in Australia, it can perhaps be assumed that there had been some discussions between students and their friends or family members at home regarding either the students’ new understandings or what I was teaching them about. As Christensen (2007) explains, a child’s home environment can shape their understandings and preconceptions of other ethnic groups—which made greater sense to me upon some encounters with these few parents.
After initially signing the Participation Consent Forms (as per ethical requirements set out by the HREC) for their children to participate in the study and the program, some parents expressed their concern about them learning about past and present Aboriginal cultures and experiences. These parents, some who had not previously attended parent-teacher interviews or engaged with the School, suddenly requested to meet with me or with the School principal or senior and middle school supervisors (the School leadership) to discuss their concern about what I was teaching.

In one parent-teacher interview, a mother of a student in Class B expressed to me that what I was teaching was wrong—that the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families from the 1920s to the 1970s was the right thing for the government to do to save them from neglect and abuse. In a more awkward encounter, a father of a student in Class B, who was also a staff member at the School, confronted me to ask why I was teaching about historical and contemporary discrimination experienced by Aboriginal people. Raising his voice and pointing at me, he told me I was tarnishing my reputation at the School by promoting my political agenda. I was concerned that he may also have talked about me to other staff. I was additionally unsettled by noticing that the senior school coordinator—my employment supervisor while I facilitated the program for Class B, observed the incident but did not raise the issue at the time, or afterwards.

The lack of support from my employment supervisor was not a lone incident. In the previous year, when facilitating the program for Class A, my supervisor was the middle school coordinator, and his lack of support for the program and for me was even more strongly demonstrated. Before I commenced facilitating the program of learning he openly criticised my anti-racism stance and teaching of Aboriginal
perspectives, cultures and knowledge. He also commented that racist jokes are merely friendly banter, and made numerous remarks about Aboriginal people, depicting them with the stereotypes prevalent in social and media discourses (Gale, 2005; Kinnane, 2010). Opposition from some teachers should not have taken me by surprise—it is documented, including by Craven (2013) and West (1999), that teachers often do not want to teach about Aboriginal Studies, and some hold negative opinions of Aboriginal people (see Sections 2.2.2 and 5.3). This is despite Standard 2.4 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers set out by AITSL (2014) in which teachers are required to aspire to proficiently provide opportunities for ‘students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages’. I did not see such demonstrations in their teacher, nor did their responses to me show a support for colleagues who provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

Further, at around the time Olivia was struggling with her learning in Lesson 8 (elaborated on in Section 5.3), my supervisor invited Olivia’s mother for a parent-teacher interview that he said he would attend with me. Before the meeting, he explained that he would take notes and present them to the Principal following the meeting. At the meeting, Olivia’s mother asked me why I was teaching about past and present cultures, and social injustices experienced by Aboriginal people. I explained that the SACSA framework offers suggestions for teaching and learning in SA, and endorses Aboriginal cultures and historical and contemporary experiences in Australia as topics for exploration. After the meeting I did not hear anything from my
supervisor, or the Principal, but I continued wondering how these incidents may affect my reputation and future employment prospects at the School.

Despite the uncertainty I experienced following opposition from some parents and the lack of support from school leadership, I remain a supporter of anti-racism initiatives, and the teaching about Aboriginal Australians’ past and present cultures and social experiences as mandated as a cross-curricula priority in the Australian curriculum. While this new learning can lead to new understandings, disorientation must often first be experienced, which can lead to some parents making complaints. I can understand how it might be difficult for school leadership to weigh the concerns of parents against the viewpoints of anti-racism and multiculturalism educators. Below and in Chapter 9, I reflect on the need for the professional development for increasing the understanding of school staff about sensitive and effective teaching of Aboriginal and also Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures—perhaps particularly in Independent Christian minority schools, though other schools would also benefit from such professional development. As elaborated on in Chapter 6, most of the students in this study started to see Aboriginal people in new positive ways, and many of them, including Fiona, saw the benefits of what they were learning about:

I have learnt a lot about them [Aboriginal people] now and I will treat Aboriginal people how they deserve to be treated. Thank you Mr Heaton for this term! (Fiona, Class A, 24 August 2009)
5.5 Summary and reflections

I had not entered this study wanting to unsettle the School community. Far from it, I believed and I still believe in the scope of the school core values and policies. Regardless, I found that my implementation of the program of learning that I have described here challenged some in the school community, as evident through comments from parents and colleagues. While Australian school communities can embrace the UN DRIP (2006), including Article 15 which states that Indigenous peoples have the right to build and maintain their dignity and diversity (in this context in relation to what is taught about their cultures and histories), at least some in this school community were not interested in extending this right to Aboriginal people.

My teaching followed curriculum guidelines of the Government of SA (DETE, 2001), and these clearly resonate with the new National Curriculum Framework (ACARA, 2011; 2013b). I had also interpreted and applied principles from the School’s anti-bullying policy and the Schools’ stated values, which are drawn upon Christ’s teachings ‘and as you would like and desire that men would do to you, do exactly so to them’ (Luke Chapter 6 verse 31, in the Amplified Version of the Holy Bible) and ‘love your neighbour as you do yourself’ (Matthew Chapter 19 verse 19, in the Amplified Version of the Holy Bible). However, given the response of some parents and some in the school leadership, the implementation of the program may have resulted in a few parents and the School leadership themselves experiencing a disorienting dilemma. The students learned that their society is not as fair as they had at first believed, particularly for Aboriginal Australians. This new learning contrasted and challenged the students’ understandings, as well as some of their parents’.
Whereas School leadership had initially supported the program and its objectives, in light of a few complaints from these parents, they became increasingly uncertain whether to continue to support it, and me as the teacher.

Before commencing this study I had been aware that parents, teachers and schools can oppose anti-racism educational initiatives (West, 1999), but I had not previously seen such opposition in operation. I concur with West’s (1999) conclusions that it is not pleasant to experience. I personally faced a disorienting dilemma—uncertain in how I respond to what I saw as a lack of support from the School leadership and uncertain about my future opportunities of promotion and career at the School. Equally, I was troubled and increasingly concerned about how racism was accommodated in the School community. Van Dijk (1993) explains that institutional leaders, including of educational institutions, have influence to permit and even perpetuate racism. The question that emerges in my mind, regards how a school should respond to the voices of parents when those voices oppose teachers who are teaching what the state and national curriculum prescribe. With these considerations, schools might identify ways they can support teachers who are incorporating state and national curricula that has a focus on informing students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and social experiences.

It was the students who were challenged as they engaged in a new discourse about Aboriginal people and Australian society. The students at times considered whether to accept what I taught them or to continue to accept the messages and images portrayed in social and media discourses—including perhaps accepting positions taken in the conversations they may have had with family members and friends. Determining what to believe was often difficult for students, as it involved them
recognising that they had made some presumptions about Aboriginal people, and so too might have other people whose opinions they value and respect. As a result, some students did not challenge and change their attitudes about Aboriginal people, and some also did not demonstrate understanding of, or sympathy towards, the social experiences of Aboriginal people—perhaps due to being disoriented and uncertain how to respond to the new discourse. In the program of learning explored in this study students were at liberty to respond as they themselves determined, as I had communicated to the students that a ‘right’ response to what they were learning about is an honest response. However, as the objective of the program was to have students consider and perhaps alter their attitudes about Aboriginal people, further studies need to explore alternative pedagogical considerations for increasing the likelihood of having all students embrace this kind of learning opportunity. (Chapter 6 commences exploring these alternative pedagogical considerations).

5.5.1 Engagement from the majority of the students

Although a minority of the students did not challenge their former understandings about Aboriginal people, I found that the majority did. Although it was challenging—especially initially—for them to consider the possibility that they may need to reconsider their prior beliefs about Aboriginal people, the majority proceeded to consider the alternative messages about Aboriginal people that were incorporated in the program. The majority increased their understanding and sympathy about the forms of prejudice, discrimination and disadvantage that the Aboriginal population has faced, and the new forms of racism they often continue to face. Their critical thinking often resulted in them challenging their beliefs about Aboriginal people and
Australian society, and considering that Australia is perhaps not quite as fair as they had first believed.

Most of the students increasingly realised that Aboriginal people are not like what they had presumed, and are actually not that much different to them. They reflected on their new realisation that no one should be judged based on presumed differences, or actual differences in skin colour, accent, spirituality and other determinants. They learned that responsibility for what they believe and for their attitudes lies with themselves; not with me, the School, or any societal or media influence. They recognised that they were in charge of reconstructing, and at times constructing for the first time, their understandings and beliefs about Aboriginal people, and Australian society.

5.5.2 Teacher as the facilitator of learning

I learned that as a teacher of an anti-racism themed program of learning my role was more of a facilitator. Although I needed to present to the students some aspects of past and present cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people, students’ responses were their own. Being in a safe and supportive learning environment assisted with this—the students’ wellbeing was my highest concern. Bigelow (2007b, p. 69) suggests that the emotional and psychological wellbeing of students is more important than achieving desired outcomes, as ‘all good teaching begins with a respect for students, their innate curiosity and their capacity to learn’. Bigelow (2007b) elaborates, and I concur, that providing such learning settings enables students to share their real thoughts and feelings. In facilitating such environments, teachers must trust their students in regard to the responses they will make to their learning.
I specifically learned that it is imperative to provide students freedom and space to explore new information, particularly where it may conflict with their prior perspectives. Students need to be able to determine how they will respond to the information presented to them, and to voice their emerging thoughts and feelings through reflecting on significant learning moments. The students in this study had ownership in responding to what they learned about the way they perceived as appropriate and honest, which I think resulted in them exploring issues more deeply than they may have otherwise. They had the opportunity to consolidate and articulate what they were learning about in their various critical and creative responses, and particularly in their reflections, narratives and expositions. In these responses, and particularly in their narrative writing, they showed imagination and empathy as they attempted to articulate their perspectives and feelings towards Aboriginal people.

I also learned that the teacher—or facilitator—needs to be responsive and flexible to in their practice, but must also stick to predetermined approaches that are grounded in sound theory. I am uncertain whether I was correct in modifying Lesson 7 for Class B in response to those students in Class A who told me it impeded the flow of the preceding lessons. At times I had to decide whether or not to implement the requests of students, such as when students found a lesson boring (elaborated on in Section 5.3). For Class B, I placed more emphasis on the stories of Nungala Fejo and other members of the Stolen Generations contained in the Apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples rather than the focus I had given in Class A to the nature of, reasons for and opposition to the Apology. In Class A students considered the responsibilities of non-Aboriginal Australians in past actions against Aboriginal Australians and their ongoing impact, and to consider whether or not they agreed
with the Apology. As the Apology remains fresh in the minds of many Australians, and was controversial when it was delivered in 2008, the students may well have discussed the lesson with their parents, which may have contributed to the complaints of some to me and the School. I realised that regardless of my flexibility in modifying my pedagogy and the learning activities, some students, such as Matt and Olivia, may have resisted learning about such injustices experienced by Aboriginal people regardless of what I did.

As the teaching of Aboriginal histories and cultures (which includes social injustices) is a cross-curricula priority in the newly released National Curriculum Framework (ACARA, 2011, 2013b), Australian teachers and schools need to identify how these will become priorities in their school, and support teachers in implementing them. There is a risk that the discretion and latitude of schools and teachers in deciding curriculum and pedagogical approaches may result in components of the curriculum being scanty covered or completely ignored. Chapter 9 discusses this autonomy schools and teachers have in determining what students are taught, and the ways professional development may provide teachers with skills and knowledge that will assist schools facilitate student learning that complements the cross-curriculum priority.

The students critically thought about social injustices in Australian society, and many questioned why they themselves do not face the institutional, structural and interpersonal forms of racism that they learned Aboriginal people encounter. Many of them, on their own accord, made connections between lessons, including how the impact of the Stolen Generations (Lesson 6) might contribute to poverty in Aboriginal communities (Lesson 8), and how ensuing unemployment may perpetuate
myths and stereotypes about Aboriginal people not wanting to work (Lesson 10). The perspectives and attitudes of adolescents will continue to be shaped by social and media discourses. However, undertaking an anti-racism school based program, such as described in this research, is a positive first step in helping young people identify and challenge their own attitudes and perspectives, and perhaps help some of them to change.
Chapter 6  New perspectives
The lessons that have improved my opinion of Aboriginal people are Stef’s visit (Aboriginals are funny and kind), media bias (not all news is true) and writing narratives (put ourselves in their shoes) [sic]. (Kris, Class B, 28 May 2010)

I had set out in this study to gauge my students’ preconceptions or feelings about Aboriginal people, and if, through this program, they might find new understandings about racism. This thesis so far has explored some of the responses of the adolescent middle school students of one school to an anti-racism program that was taught. The focus in this chapter is on any new perceptions the students developed about Aboriginal people as a result of their learning. Chapter 7 then goes on to explore if the students experienced empathy, and Chapter 8 seeks to find what other feelings these students may have developed. Chapter 9 then provides some overarching reflections and suggestions for teachers, as well as researchers, to continue to investigate the value of anti-racism education in middle schools.

This chapter elaborates on what occurred after most of the students experienced disorientation (explored in Chapter 4) and engaged in a new discourse about Aboriginal people (Chapter 5). For most of the students the new discourse conflicted with many of their former understandings and perspectives about Aboriginal people, which resulted in them looking again at what they knew, or thought they knew, about the other group of people. While the content of the program of learning was predetermined in consultation with Aboriginal elders and educators, and consideration of theoretical positions through literature review, the students were given rein to creatively choose how they responded to the information that was presented to them. They were encouraged to think outside the box, informed that a ‘right’ answer is a
considered and honest answer (Section 3.4). In this chapter I consider the value of providing students this freedom to explore the cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people, in light of the new understandings and perceptions that they developed. I discuss the students’ changing view of the traits Aboriginal people may hold, and what they considered these traits might be. I explore whether the students altered their perspectives on, or understandings about, Australian society; coming to understand that the privileges or opportunities enjoyed by some in society are not always available to others. I then discuss the cognitive capacity and desire of students to work through disorientation and critical thinking towards experiencing some alterations of their perspectives.

I first conceptualise what is meant by new and altered perspectives, along with the limitations of exploring them in the context of this study. With these concepts in mind, I draw upon the students’ self-reported perspectives of Aboriginal people in their initial and final survey responses to provide some indication of the new perspectives the students formed and the learning moments that assisted their development. I discuss the ways that students embedded these new perspectives into their reflective, creative and critical writing tasks, and the significance of this in the learning experience. Chapter 7 further elaborates on these expressive and often empathetic pieces of writing in order to identify how the students developed their new perspectives.
6.1 Conceptualising new or altered perspectives

When I started this study, I was not certain if my teaching about Aboriginal Australian experiences would help my students better understand the nature of racism. But I had a desire to find out.

Before teaching the students and conducting this research, I reviewed what various educators of children and adolescents said about the explicit and implicit learning objectives and outcomes of developing new perspectives among students (reviewed in Section 2.3.4). Cloues (2006), for instance, reports how children started to see worms not as repulsive but as incredibly valuable for turning human waste into compost, and achieved the larger objective of supporting initiatives of caring for the environment. More specific to this study, Bigelow (2007a) and Bigelow and Diamond (2006) report how adolescent students can change their perspectives toward ethnic minority groups upon learning about their social oppression. Osinksy (2006) found that after learning about Japanese cultures and the injustice of the bombing of Osaka, American students developed new perspectives toward Japanese people. These studies provide some indication of the possibilities of achieving an alteration of perspectives, but not so much a possible process for accomplishing it.

As discussed in Section 2.3, the learning process of TLT provides a starting point from which to explore how students (albeit adults) might experience what Mezirow (1997, 1994, 2000) terms a perspective transformation—which he explains occurs infrequently. In transformative learning, students can move away from old ways of understanding as they experience deep changes in their perspectives—changes that Kegan (2000, p. 47) refers to as ‘epistemological’. Chapters 4 and 5 explored some
of the process the students in this study engaged in towards developing new perspectives, including experiencing disorientation (Section 4.2) and engaging in a new discourse that comprised critical thinking and reflection (Section 5.1). I have also elaborated on the limitations to adolescents experiencing the learning processes experienced by adults as framed in TLT, particularly in relation to the ways adolescents might have developed and now challenge and change their perspectives and understandings. Due to differences between adolescents and adults, this study does not presume a transformation of perspectives is attainable by the former—and particularly not a transformation that Courtenay, Merriam and Reeves (1998, p. 65) describes as permanent or ‘irreversible’. Adolescent—even adult—students are susceptible to continue changing their perspectives after a program of learning is over—which in the context of this study may involve social and media discourse continuing to influence their views about Aboriginal people.

Accordingly, this chapter reviews the data to examine whether some alteration of perspectives may occur throughout the duration of the program of learning. Whether this can occur is important to establish, as even short-term outcomes are valuable in anti-racism education among middle school students. As adolescents are open to altering their perspectives, middle school education is an opportune time for the facilitation of anti-racism education. Although it is not clear if adolescents experience an alteration of perspectives to the same extent as adults, this study explores whether and how adolescent students may experience some—albeit limited—alteration. The position taken in this study is that because adolescents are open to social and media discourse, they might also be open to new discourse in an anti-racism program of learning. I explore the extent to which the students did alter
their perspectives, keeping in mind that these new perspectives may be susceptible to further alteration after their engagement in an educational program.

In exploring how students might alter their perspectives, I acknowledge that positive and negative presumptions can be held by the one person simultaneously (discussed in Section 4.1). Also, unfavourable preconceptions can remain hidden behind veneers or appearances of tolerance (Bonnett, 2000). With this in mind, this chapter explores whether students held more favourable than unfavourable preconceptions about Aboriginal people after demonstrating early in Lesson 1 that they held more unfavourable than favourable preconceptions. Such a change would provide some indication of any alteration of perspectives among the students, and the specific new perspectives possibly developed by individual students.

Due to the limitations of students’ self-reporting their perspectives or attitudes, I verified them by looking at students’ lesson and program reflections on their learning experience—particularly their reflections on whether they were starting to perceive Aboriginal people in new ways in relation to their disagreement or agreement with positive traits describing them. As reported on in Section 4.1, the students’ initial and final self-reported perspectives on the traits they perceive Aboriginal people to have assisted to pinpoint the students’ reflections, and critical and creative writing that showed their new perspectives. Chapter 7 continues this reflection, exploring empathy. I consider too, if such altered ways of knowing might resemble what Mezzena (2011, p. 192) refers to as learners altering their ‘ways of knowing’ that ‘cannot be reduced to rationality’. I explore the way the complexity, multiplicity and mutability of identity among another group of people (Zine, 2008), was better
appreciated—Aboriginal people in the context of this study—as they moved towards some new perspectives.

**6.2 Separation between old and new perspectives**

Before engaging in the new discourse and exploring historical and contemporary Aboriginal cultures, injustices and accomplishments, the students had not known much at all about Aboriginal people. What they proceeded to learn about them disorientated their understandings. While they had initially held more unfavourable than favourable presumptions about Aboriginal people in relation to how they perceived their traits (as discussed in Section 4.1), they progressively started to view them in a new light. This section presents a picture of the students’ progressive alteration of perspective, before Section 6.3 presents the overall changes in the students’ self-reported perspectives as per their Survey 3 responses and rich reflections on their learning experience.

To give an indication of the progressive development of new perspectives, I refer to the lessons that the students said assisted them to change their specific perceptions of Aboriginal people. I explore the students’ responses to and reflections on the program, lesson by lesson, to show the moments they altered their perspectives. These lessons and progressive development of new perspectives are explored through a TLT lens as presented by Jarvis (2011) and also Koulaouzides (2011) in relation to experiencing increasing disjuncture between old and new perspectives.

When the program commenced the students agreed with the views of friends, family and others about Aboriginal people, experiencing a state that Jarvis (2011, p. 18) refers to as coincidence—a ‘sense of harmony’ with the world. Like older students in
the context of TLT studies, my students had no reason to think that their presumptions were faulty (Schutz, Luckmann, Engelhardt & Zaner, 1974, p. 7), as they had been socialised to think that way (Hall, 1976). They were ‘at ease’ in their worldviews, holding what Bourdieu (1977, p. 80) refers to as ‘constant’ and ‘known’ or common sense understandings—or presumptions. This notion of coincidence and what Jarvis refers to as divergence—a slight gap in their prior perceptions or what they expect to perceive, and their new perceptions—and increasing separation that disoriented the students is explored in this section.

This current section explores the widening gap of disjuncture between the students’ old and new perceptions, which for some students developed early, for some late, and for others gradually throughout the program. Jarvis (2011) argues that children can experience some divergence between old and new perspectives, making transformative learning fundamental to cognitive, as well as life-long, learning. This contrasts distinctions made by Mezirow (2000) between the learning of children and adolescents. This chapter does not engage in this debate, but rather only uses some concepts of TLT, including disjuncture, as a launch pad to explore these students’ learning experience.

At the point of experiencing considerable separation, or a wide or ‘unbridgeable’ gap, Jarvis (2011) explains that learners recognise that their expectations or presumptions about their world (or Aboriginal people in the case of this study) are far apart from what they are learning, which results in learning being either meaningless or meaningful. A meaningless or ‘non-learning’ event (Jarvis, 2011, p. 20) occurs when the learning is ‘too much’ for students, and they may devise behaviours for coping with the situation, such as avoidance, resistance, denial or
criticism of the learning. Such responses were demonstrated by some students in this study, including Matt (see Section 5.3). This chapter, however, places greater emphasis on the students’ meaningful learning experiences, those that involved them working at rectifying the dilemma of what to do with the alternative information about Australian society and the Aboriginal population. Based on Survey 3 responses and reflections from the students, I elaborate on the range of learning that indicated separation between old and new perceptions that occurred during the program, commencing with early in Unit 1 when students learned about the cultures of Aboriginal people.

6.2.1 Early separation while exploring Aboriginal cultures

I liked their culture and their way of living and it made me see them in a whole new way. (Jim, Class B, Lesson 1 Reflection, 10 May 2010)

From looking at the lessons that the students indicated opened them to new perspectives about Aboriginal people in relation to the traits listed on the Survey 3, I observed that many experienced some alteration of their perspectives early on. Most students indicated that the four lessons that comprised Unit 1 assisted them to revise most of their perceptions of Aboriginal people. Immediately after completing the first two surveys in Lesson 1 the students’ viewed photographs of Pitjantjatjara Aboriginal children engaging in creative cultural activities. A number of the students (12 of the 17 in attendance in Class A, and 19 of the 28 in Class B) even at this early stage indicated in their lesson reflections that this first lesson helped them to start softening their perspectives toward Aboriginal people. The students had initially disagreed that Aboriginal people may have traits such as fun-loving, peaceful, team-oriented, beautiful, responsible, clever, good leaders and peaceful, but in their
reflections (as seen above in Jim’s reflection) and narrative writing (discussed later in this section) it was evident that these students were starting to see that they could. After having selected disagree at the start of the lessons that Aboriginal people are advanced (in respect to their technology) and also peaceful, at the end of the lessons Jim agreed that they have had indeed these characteristics. After completing Survey 3, Jim specifically indicated that Lesson 1 had assisted him to see Aboriginal people in new ways—before ensuing lessons helped to reinforce his new perspectives.

Jim’s classmates, including Jon, also agreed that Aboriginal people could be team-oriented and peaceful after having had initially disagreed. This was evident not only in Jon and others’ survey responses and Lesson 1 Reflections, but also in their narrative writing, as they wrote from an imagined perspective of an Aboriginal character:

> Back when we were kids we would play lots of games together. We would have so much fun running down the big sand dunes. Our mothers would teach us the art of track-making. Every now and again we would sit with our fathers and other men and we would throw the spear at a paddy melon that we found somewhere. It was hard to get good at it but we did [sic]. (Jon, Class B, Narrative: Ago, 19 May 2010)

In this extract, Jon shows that he believes Aboriginal people can be fun-loving, others-oriented, intelligent and talented. This complements the alterations in his perspectives that were evident throughout the program in relation to these traits—after disagreeing and strongly disagreeing initially, he agreed and strongly agreed. Nine of the 18 students in Class A, and 11 of the 22 in Class B agreed that Lesson 1 assisted them to evaluate their specific perspectives on Aboriginal people.
Lesson 2 built upon Lesson 1, introducing students to cultural hunting, gathering and culinary practices, and a culture of community among and between Aboriginal families. After viewing the short documentary about elders teaching Aboriginal children these skills, 15 students in Class A and also 15 students in Class B indicated that the lesson assisted them to improve their perspectives. From appreciating the way Aboriginal people collaborate in close-knit communities, Charles ended up strongly agreeing in Survey 3 that they are generous and team-oriented after having at first disagreed.

Throughout the program it became increasingly apparent that each lesson opened some of the students to new perspectives, but Lessons 3 and 4 were particularly helpful. The students really enjoyed learning more about Aboriginal people at the park, and looked around them at the creek and in between the trees to imagine the various cultural activities that they were learning about. Seven students in Class A indicated in their Lesson 3 reflections that they saw various positive qualities held by Aboriginal people, as did 11 in Class B. Sam, for instance, was affected by the experience; he decreased his level of agreement to them being impatient, boring and even aggressive, and increased his agreement to them being responsible and wise. From this he proceeded to strongly agree that Aboriginal people are team-oriented. Graham also appreciated the creativity and talent involved in hunting technologies:

When Mr Heaton said that Aboriginal people made 40 meter [sic] long nets to catch kangaroos it impressed me. (Graham, Class B, Lesson 3 Reflection, 11 May 2010)

Playing the games in Lesson 4 seemed to be most enjoyed by the students. Many reflected that, as they looked for one another through the trees and bushes and around
the creek playing hide and seek, they imagined being an Aboriginal child in the serene Australian landscape. They started to see Aboriginal people and their cultures and experiences from what they perceived to be an Aboriginal perspective, and simultaneously changed their own. Donna wrote in her Lesson 4 reflection, “I loved the games!”, and at the end of the program she reflected that her participation in playing the games led her to change some of her perspectives, rejecting outright her initial disparaging views. She disagreed that Aboriginal people are evil, dull, violent, self-oriented, unfriendly and arrogant, after she had initially agreed.

From using what they learned about in Unit 1 (Lessons 1 to 4), the students imaginatively wrote a narrative from the perspective of an Aboriginal character. In the beginning paragraphs I could see how the students consolidated and articulated their new learning in creative expression. Many of the students gave their characters favourable traits that reflected some developing perspectives. They also specifically incorporated favourable cultural aspects from Unit 1 in their narratives. For instance, Kim incorporated what she learned about in Lesson 2 to imaginatively write:

One of my favourite responsibilities was going out with my uncles to search for mud mussels. Once we found the mussels we would crack open the shells using rocks. We also carried heavy food back home. Occasionally I would hurt my back, but never less I always felt worthy when I provided for the community. (Kim, Class B, Narrative, 20 May 2010)

Kim had previously shared with the class that she had hurt her back when helping her own family around their house. In her narrative writing Kim indicated that she was starting to perceive Aboriginal people to be responsible, others-oriented and
generous—traits that she agreed they held at the close of the program despite disagreeing at the commencement of the program.

Students’ narrative writing often involved them sorting through what they were learning about and selecting what they would write about in their stories—including what perspectives should be included. Numerous students drew upon what they learned in Lesson 1—including Jess, who also used what she had imagined during Lesson 3 at the park. Like most of her classmates, Jess imagined interactions in Aboriginal communities—from producing baskets to building wiltjas (temporary shelters) to playing games—and incorporated these imaginings into her story writing to show the care, concern and love between a mother and son:

   It was hot and my son and I were picking some berries. I remember Kana my son was saying how he wanted to pick one hundred berries. We were up to around forty. I was telling him how much I loved him. He would say, ‘Mum I know you love me you tell me all the time’. I remember him putting his hands in a big bush. He had ripped his arm out very fast and on the way he cut his arm on a twig [sic]. I thanked God that I had brought my first aid kit. (Jess, Class B, Narrative: *Interrupted*, 17 May 2010)

At the start of the program Jess selected *unsure* in response to the trait good parents, *disagree* in response to gentle, and *strongly disagree* in response to loving, at the close of the program Jess agreed that Aboriginal people have those traits.
6.2.2   Gradual separation throughout the program

The first unit of the program assisted students to alter their perspectives, all but a few of the students indicated that there were various lessons in the following three units that also assisted them to alter other perspectives. These found that all lessons assisted them to change one or two of their perceptions about Aboriginal people. For those who altered many of their perspectives in Unit 1, proceeding lessons further strengthened their new perspectives, and some students who experienced early or progressive separation between their new perceptions and old presumptions reaching a wide gap by the end of the program. However, some students experienced what Jarvis (2011) describes as a meaningless or non-learning moment, in which they consciously or subconsciously tried to ignore the gap and not close it.

Learning about the historical and contemporary injustices experienced by Aboriginal people in Unit 2 specifically assisted many of the students to see Aboriginal people as resilient, patient, good parents, responsible, good leaders and forgiving. I reflected on the fact that it could have been the students’ emotional engagement in learning about the oppressive experiences of Aboriginal people that caused the larger degree of disjuncture between their old and new perspectives in Unit 2. Dirkx (2000, 2006) muses that the role of emotion and intuition are crucial aspects of transformative learning, and Section 4.2.3 as well as Section 8.2.2 explore further the role of moral indignation in disorienting the students’ beliefs about Aboriginal people.

Unit 1 provided a contrast to Unit 2; the introduction of historical injustices experienced by Aboriginal people in the latter moved the students from the celebration of Aboriginal cultures to commiseration. The new discourse in Unit 2 led the students to recognise the extent of the disruption on Aboriginal people caused by
British settlement. In Lesson 5, the students learned about the events of genocide against Aboriginal people by settlers in the nineteenth century, particularly in relation to Myall Creek Station and Slaughterhouse Creek. Two weeks after Lesson 5, in their program reflections, 12 students in Class A and 22 in Class B recalled that this lesson assisted them to agree or strongly agree Aboriginal people are peaceful, forgiving, resilient, loving and good parents. Britney had initially strongly disagreed that Aboriginal people have positive traits, such as being approachable, intelligent and responsible among other descriptions, but:

I learned to tolerate Aboriginal people. (Britney, Class A, Lesson 5 Reflection, 5 August 2009)

While this may not have been a significant attitude alteration for other students, it was for her. While the development of positive or favourable attitudes was the objective of this study, the steps students took towards developing such outlooks are also recognised. Sure enough, at the close of the program Britney proceeded to agree and sometimes strongly agree that Aboriginal people hold most of the positive traits. Her transition to developing new, positive perspectives toward them comprised a slow but steady process (elaborated on in Section 6.2.2).

Lesson 6 extended the students’ emerging new perspectives on Aboriginal people. Learning about the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families helped the children to first sympathise with their experiences in light of past and ongoing effects on Aboriginal communities. The students reflected that viewing Rabbit Proof Fence was significant to them in numerous ways. Reg, for instance, altered his perspectives about Aboriginal people while viewing the film. He not only felt sadness and learned a lot about the impact of racism, as he contrasted the
Aboriginal parents with the care he learned many Aboriginal children received on missions after being forcibly removed:

In the time of the Stolen Generations I saw my best friends have their babies taken. It was heart breaking to watch children being forcefully [sic] removed from their screaming parents. The kids were separated from them to be taken to a mission, where they would be treated unfairly, with some never to see their parents again. Unnecessary measures were taken in the mission, such as beatings. (Reg, Class A, Narrative: Stolen, 14 August 2009)

Some students, including Cindy, complained about Lesson 7, in which they learned about the Apology to members of the Stolen Generations and their families delivered by the Australian Government (2008) (discussed in Section 5.3). However, the majority of students concluded that this lesson assisted them to alter numerous perspectives about Aboriginal people they had held. There were 10 students in Class A and 18 in Class B who indicated that their perspectives toward Aboriginal people improved as a result of reviewing the speech. Three weeks later when reflecting on all of the lessons, six of these ten students in Class A, and 16 of the 18 in Class B identified this lesson as helping them to alter their perspectives about the various characteristics of Aboriginal people listed in the surveys.

Unit 3 turned the students’ attention to contemporary forms of racism experienced by Aboriginal people, but a focus of this was still on their resilience in response to these experiences. Lesson 8 was helpful in this. Learning about the lower standards of housing, health, education, employment, legal representation and life expectancy that Aboriginal people experience compared to the rest of the population (ABS, 2005) unsettled their former perspectives and understandings about Australian society.
Seeing the discrimination, or at least the disadvantage, they face helped the students to identify that there remains racism in Australia, which may well inform media broadcasting about Aboriginal people (explored in Lesson 11) and hence possibly informed their own personal perspectives toward them. The students recognised that Aboriginal people are often excluded from equal opportunities, and that their advocacy against and angst toward these inequalities does not make them aggressive or unfriendly but, rather, responsible and good leaders to their families and communities. As discussed in Sections 5.3, several students, including Olivia and Rosa, initially could not accept that Aboriginal people today can still experience such social injustices. However, when reflecting on this lesson, eight of the 14 students in attendance in Class A and 17 of the 22 in attendance in Class B indicated that being presented with these statistics assisted them to improve their perspectives about Aboriginal people.

The students enjoyed meeting Tanya, an African-Australian in Lesson 9, and benefitted from listening to her stories of living in Australia, which included some experiences of racism. Tanya recounted some occasions in which people spoke to her and behaved towards her in a racist manner, but also the way she then harboured no malice. The students reflected that listening to Tanya brought the concepts of racism and its contemporary impact on people alive, and was a useful break from the facts and figures presented to them in the previous lesson. They easily made links to similar experiences of racism experienced by Aboriginal people, as evident in their narrative and exposition writing, and recognised that racism experienced by Aboriginal people has a strong historical and contemporary place in Australia. As they drew connections between Tanya’s stories and the racism they had learned
about in earlier lessons, many started to view Aboriginal people as gentle, forgiving, responsible and beautiful as evident in their narrative writing and also in their responses to Surveys 3 and 4.

Tiff, for instance, agreed that Aboriginal people are talented, gentle, loving and wise after she had disagreed. Jim was also affected by Tanya’s visit. He indicated that this and earlier lessons caused him to increase his agreement that Aboriginal people were good leaders, gentle, loving, advanced and well presented, i.e. more like himself. Some of his altered perspectives are evident in his narrative-writing. His narrative writing from the perspective of an Aboriginal character, Warragul, shows Jim’s new ways of thinking about the harm prejudice can cause:

A very common type of racism occurs almost every day. When some people walk past they give you this type of stare that almost makes you feel like you have a tattoo on your forehead saying something like ‘I’m a disgrace’ or ‘everyone look at me I’m ugly!’. It just really ruins your day, and you feel as though no one appreciates you for who you are. (Jim, Class B, Narrative: Warragul, 21 May 2010)

Learning about the effect of racism on Tanya, and the way that she had forgiven people who have made racist comments to her (which students recognised shares resonance with the experiences and responses of Aboriginal people), assisted many students to alter their perspectives. Thirteen of the 15 students present for the lesson in Class A, and 22 of the 27 in Class B, agreed that they had improved their perspectives toward Aboriginal people. One week later, at the close of the final lesson, seven of the former and 16 of the latter reflected that this lesson was significant in altering their perspectives, and mostly in relation to them seeing
Aboriginal people as resilient and forgiving. Lessons 11 and 12 on racist myths and biased news reporting respectively also helped students understand the impact of racism on Aboriginal people. David increased his agreement in response to the traits responsible, approachable and godly, and he argued in his narrative that there should be more of a ‘fair go’:

Also, my people face scrutiny from the media all because of our skin [sic]. People decide to run a lie in either made up statistics or a false knowing of the real story[sic]. (David, Class B, Narrative: Resilient Me, 20 May 2010)

The way that the students’ creative narrative writing enabled them to show their new perspectives about Aboriginal people was evident time and time again. This was often the case in the students’ expository writing. From learning in Lesson 8 about the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people in the areas of health, housing, education and employment, Jill showed her new understanding that they are not only resilient, but also loving, considerate and responsible:

I also worry about the health figures these days. It seems like more and more Aboriginal people have health problems. When I think about all the Aboriginals [sic] that have heart diseases it puts me in agony. For instance, my mother, a very unique and wonderful woman, passed away at the age of 30. Heart disease was the main cause of her death. She had suffered greatly in many years [sic]. However, she never complained once. My mother was strong

1 “Fair go” is an Australian expression pertaining to equal or fair opportunity for all people.
and resilient. She lived a full life of never ending joys [sic]. (Jill, Class B, Exposition: *My People*, 26 May 2010)

As the students developed new perspectives about Aboriginal people they often reflected on the harm of prejudice and that they should not make generalisations. This was an alteration of their ways of knowing (see Section 6.5.2).

### 6.2.3 Separation late in the program

While most of the students altered their perspectives early on or gradually throughout the program, by Unit 4 some still had not. A number of these students recognised that what they were learning contrasted with their initial perceptions of Aboriginal people, and they were reluctant to consider or accept the new discourse. Some were considering the new information but just needed time, before eventually altering their views in this final unit of the program. Following learning about the past and present cultures and injustices toward Aboriginal people in Units 1 to 3, Unit 4 brought the learning to a climax. Learning about Aboriginal models, actors and war heroes moved many of the students to see them as beautiful, talented and responsible, among other traits. For those students who had already started shifting their perspectives in Units 1 to 3, Unit 4 served to enhance their view.

Some aspects of Units 2 and 3 continued into Unit 4, such as learning in Lesson 12 about the lack of fashion modelling opportunities for Aboriginal people. However, the focus of this lesson was for students to appreciate the success of a number of young Aboriginal women despite the absence of prospects. The lesson was about having the students learn more about the ongoing struggle of Aboriginal people for equal opportunities within contemporary society, and help them to realise that
Aboriginal people can be just as successful as non-Aboriginal models in the fashion industry, and because of this be role models. At the end of the lesson, 13 of the 18 students in Class A and 23 of the 26 in Class B agreed that their perspectives about Aboriginal people improved. A week later, when the students reflected on the lessons, 15 in Class A and 21 in Class B indicated that this lesson assisted them to see Aboriginal people in a better way, including as talented, well-presented and resilient (and to not see them as ugly and dirty—after numerous students had agreed that they did initially).

A highly effective lesson was Lesson 13, in which the students viewed and responded to the documentary *The Making of Rabbit Proof Fence* (Thomas, 2002) and also the article by *The Daily Telegraph* (2009) about Australian film Samson and Delilah winning the Cannes prize. From the point of view of the students’ lesson and program reflections, and also from the position and tone they used in their narrative writing, I observed that the students appreciated what they learning about while viewing the film in Lesson 6, particularly about the acting talent of the three young Indigenous actors who played Molly, Daisy and Gracie in the film. The students were amazed by the acting talent of the three girls who played these characters despite having never acted before. The lesson helped numerous students, including Fiona, agree they are talented:

I am glad these girls were picked and they all did an amazing job. (Catherine, Class B, Lesson 13 Reflection, 25 May 2010)

Likewise, the students’ online research on the Australian Government (2013) website) of the achievements of NAIDOC award winners in Lesson 14 involved seven students in Class A reflecting that they had improved their perspectives toward
Aboriginal people. These perspectives were in relation to them perceiving Aboriginal people as talented, wise and loving. At the end of the final lesson, Mark recalled that it had assisted him to see them as good leaders. This new perspective was evident in his writing:

I appreciate the way that many Aboriginal people have helped the Australian community. (Mark, Class A, Lesson 14 Reflection, 19 August 2009)

Learning about the sacrifice that Aboriginal soldiers made for Australia in Lesson 15 then helped further enhance a number of the students’ new perspectives about Aboriginal people. Gemma, for instance, changed from disagreeing that Aboriginal people are responsible and good leaders to agreeing, and reflected:

Aboriginal people joined the army even when they weren’t considered ‘Australians’ and gave their lives to those who didn’t care about them.

(Gemma, Class B, Lesson 14 Reflection, 26 May 2010)

Tiff was also affected by what she learned in this lesson. Upon learning about the manner in which Aboriginal soldiers were treated, and that they served their nation in war despite them not being recognised as Australian citizens, she agreed they are resilient—after having initially disagreed with this.

Meeting Stef and listening to her cultural viewpoints on society and the environment was also helpful to the students in them further altering their perspectives about Aboriginal people. Gail indicated that learning ‘the way Aboriginal people greet each other even if they don’t know them’ was most significant to her, and helped her to respect this component of their culture, and to see them as loving and approachable.
Helen was the only Aboriginal student participant in the study and, like her classmates, she at first held unfavourable presumptions about Aboriginal people (elaborated on in Section 4.1). She specified before the program commenced that she did not have close relationships with anyone in her family who identified as Aboriginal, and she had developed her views based on conversations with family and friends and from viewing television and listening to the radio. She reflected that there were numerous lessons throughout the program that had shifted her understandings about Aboriginal people, but Lesson 16, in which she and her classmates met Stef, was the most significant. The next day when reflecting on the lesson, she wrote:

I loved the poems that she read and how she explained them and how she gave me a ring and a bracelet [sic]. (Helen, Class A, Lesson 16 Reflection, 21 August 2009)

These gifts, from one Aboriginal person to another, led Helen to agree that Aboriginal people—her people—are approachable and loving after she had initially disagreed. Like her classmates, her engagement in this program resulted in her experiencing an alteration of her perspectives.

### 6.3 The overall shift in students’ perspectives

While the students’ levels of disjuncture occurred at different frequencies, and some experienced only a slight disjuncture from their original perspectives, overall, the Survey 1 and 3 responses provide some indication of an alteration of perspectives that occurred. These indications are strengthened by the students’ reflections on the program of learning, particularly on their initial and changing perspectives (elaborated on in Section 6.3). While keeping in mind the limitations of self-reported
Likert scale surveys and the concept of identifying one’s own attitudes (elaborated on in Section 3.2.2), an indication that perspectives did change is evident from this survey data.

Section 4.1 elaborated that the students initially made considerably more unfavourable than favourable presumptions about Aboriginal people. Some strongly disagreed that Aboriginal people hold numerous favourable traits, such as intelligence, are friendly and are responsible, while some did so in response to fewer of these traits and were more inclined to select unsure. Students’ responses of agreement to the unfavourable traits that are antonymous to these favourable traits—such as unintelligent, unfriendly and irresponsible—complemented or verified these responses. There are various limitations to such measures, including different interpretations of the traits and different weight to the levels of agreement given by students. The response unsure can be used as a level of agreement or disagreement, a way to not reveal preconceptions, or to indicate a lack of presumption (see Section 4.1). Regardless, the pre-program survey responses provide an indicative insight into how the students tended to make unfavourable presumptions about Aboriginal people, including presuming that an unknown Aboriginal boy has more unfavourable traits compared to a non-Aboriginal boy.

As explored earlier in Section 6.2, students started to develop new perspectives about Aboriginal people during the program. Keeping in mind the limitations to research participants reporting their personal attitudes, Survey 3 was identical to Survey 1, to provide an indicative measure of any alteration of students’ perspectives. To respond to Survey 3, students were asked to be honest and select the levels of agreement to the same traits describing Aboriginal people that were in the Survey 1, but in light of
how they now perceive Aboriginal people following their engagement in the program. The students were considerably more inclined to agree that Aboriginal people hold favourable traits, and disagree they hold the unfavourable traits, than they had been at the beginning of the program.

The levels of disagreement to the unfavourable traits of the students in Class A and Class B corresponded to their agreement to the favourable traits and, for simplicity of reporting only the latter are presented in Figure 6.1. The students’ Survey 3 mean levels of agreement to the favourable traits describing Aboriginal people of 3.7 (considerably above *unsure* [3.0] and towards *agree* [4.0]) were only slightly less than their Survey 2 levels of agreement (3.6) to the unknown non-Aboriginal boy, and significantly higher than their initial level of 2.9 (a tad below *unsure* and closer to *disagree* [2.0] than *agree*). The figure also shows the students’ responses to Survey 4 held six months after the completion of Survey 3, to provide an indication of the medium-term effect or outcome of the program in relation to altered perspectives. The students’ levels of agreement in Survey 4 were only a tad lower than their levels in Survey 3. The figure also shows that the students’ mean levels of agreement to numerous favourable traits increased greatly from the beginning to the end of the program, while their levels of agreement to other traits, such as forgiving only increased slightly. No favourable trait was responded to with a lower mean level of agreement at the immediate close of the program than at the beginning. The difference between old and new perspectives was greater for some students than for others, with Tiff, Tom and Suzy strongly agreeing that Aboriginal people hold over half of the favourable traits after having initially selected disagree to most of these.
However, some students responded with a lower mean level of agreement to the favourable traits describing Aboriginal people at the completion of the program than at its commencement. After they had initially agreed to a number of the favourable
traits, in Survey 3 they were more inclined to select unsure. Research beyond this current study could show whether such uncertainty is due to a growing appreciation of the diversity, multiplicity and qualities within any group, and to not generalise. This poses a further limitation to these indicative measures, but not necessarily a negative one. These students opted to not presume anything, whether favourable or unfavourable, which can be a meaningful anti-racism learning outcome. Another desirable learning outcome, however, is for students to presume favourable traits in light of learning about Aboriginal cultures and responses to social injustices.

6.4 The new perceptions of the traits of Aboriginal people

There are different ways that any one person may perceive another person. Accordingly, it is important to give due consideration to the different types of traits that the students began to attribute to Aboriginal people. This section emphasises the multi-faceted components of the students’ new views. This kaleidoscope of perspectives provided them a lens or filter through which to see Aboriginal people in positive new ways. As the students learned about the dedication of Aboriginal people to community and the wider Australian community, including their sacrifice during times of war, they increasingly caught a glimpse of the strength of character of Aboriginal people amidst injustice. The students’ new perspectives about Aboriginal people are categorised into four types—how they perceive their abilities, appearance, social interactions and societal presence. These categories assist in providing an understanding of their new types of perspectives on Aboriginal people in relation to their perceived traits. At the end of this chapter, I reflect on the bigger outcome of the students seeing Aboriginal people in light of these categories as a whole.
6.4.1 Abilities

Throughout the program, students developed new perspectives about the abilities of Aboriginal people, particularly in Lessons 2 and 3. Learning about the way Aboriginal people apply cultural skills to help family and community members led students to see Aboriginal people as talented. Graham and numerous other boys were impressed with the hunting and other technologies and techniques of Aboriginal people, and were captivated by the huge nets that they dropped out of trees to capture unsuspecting prey. The girls were intrigued by the intricate skills of Aboriginal girls and women in basket weaving and other craft. While this was often the case it was not always the case; some of the girls enjoyed learning about the technologies and techniques and some of the boys liked learning about their art and craft skills.

While perceiving the abilities of Aboriginal people, many of the students saw them as responsible in relation to their collaboration in their respective Aboriginal communities and also in wider society. While in Unit 1 the students mainly perceived the abilities of Aboriginal people in relation to them serving their community, in Unit 4 they learned about their abilities in wider Australian society. Students as a whole, (in both Class A and Class B) extended their understanding of Aboriginal people being responsible from unsure (2.9) to nearly agree (3.7). Gemma and numerous others began to perceive them as generous, responsible and team-oriented as they learned about their skills and sacrifice in service to the world war effort despite encountering hostility from other Australians (see Section 4.2.3). Like many of her classmates, Gemma’s growing appreciation of the abilities and efforts of Aboriginal people across the five lessons that comprised Unit 4 led her to strongly agree they are talented after she had first been unsure. She had also been unsure if
they are resilient, but agreed that they are upon learning about the Australian wartime service of Aboriginal soldiers, even when they were denied the right of being Australian citizens. Learning about some of the many contemporary achievements of Aboriginal people when online searching for NAIDOC award winners in Lesson 14 led to students understanding Aboriginal people as good leaders.

### 6.4.2 Appearance

While I did not want the students assessing anyone as beautiful (or not), I did not want them to allow aesthetic differences, including skin colour, shape of lips and nose and other features to influence their perspectives. Racial prejudices are often centred on the aesthetic differences of another ethnic group, and can be used as a basis from which to build other dislikes (or other dislikes can be packaged together with a dislike of aesthetic differences). As Dolby (2000, p. 7) states (elaborated on in Section 2.2.1), young people can use the concept of personal ‘tastes’ or preferences to justify their disliking of some ethnic groups. Learning about Aboriginal models in Lesson 12 was intended to help them understand this; they read a news article about successful Aboriginal youth models who had experienced numerous setbacks. The pictures of Aboriginal models were new to them—they had only seen negative depictions of Aboriginal people previously. Fiona and her peers recognised that Aboriginal people can be attractive:

> There are some pretty Aboriginal models … they can flaunt it well. (Fiona, Class A, Lesson 12 Reflection, 17 August 2009)

Gemma had previously strongly disagreed that Aboriginal people are well-presented, but later indicated that viewing and learning about the models, particularly in regard
to their strength of character, influenced her to agree that they are. She also perceived their resilience and talent:

Aboriginal girls are being showed that it doesn’t matter what colour they are they can still do anything that other Australians can do. (Gemma, Class B, Lesson 12 Reflection, 24 May 2010)

Students’ altered perspectives regarding Aboriginal people being well presented was also developed in other lessons as they learned about NAIDOC award winners, members of the Stolen Generations, and other Aboriginal people. Although it was not the intended purpose of Lesson 16, numerous students indicated how meeting Stef, an Aboriginal elder, helped them to see that Aboriginal people are well-presented. Among both classes, the mean level of agreement to the statement ‘Aboriginal people are beautiful’ increased sizeably, from 2.8 at the beginning if the program to 3.9 at the end, and their response to well-presented moved from 2.6 to 3.4. There is blurriness between these new perceptions and their perspectives about Aboriginal peoples’ abilities, societal presence and social interactions. There was a bigger lesson here—the students’ perception of Aboriginal people being well presented and beautiful also had to do with their inner life—their strength of character and love in times of adversity and ongoing hardship—which show the social interactions of Aboriginal people.

6.4.3 Social interactions

The students changed their perspectives on the social interactions of Aboriginal people, which predominantly has to do with perception in light of their social interactions. A week before the program commenced the students learned that fun-loving, team-oriented, loving, gentle, generous, good parents and humorous qualities
relate to how a person interacts positively in their relationships with their family, community and wider social surrounds. The students began to see Aboriginal people in this light, as well as being patient, peaceful and forgiving in their interactions with non-Aboriginal Australians despite past and ongoing race-related inequalities. The students’ perspectives about Aboriginal people in terms of them being patient were initially the lowest of all the 24 traits listed in Survey 1, at well below unsure. Learning about how members of the Stolen Generations waited so long for an apology from the Australian Government was pivotal for many changing their perspectives, as well as their feelings toward them (explored further in Chapter 8), with Reg, for example, reflecting:

It was heart breaking to watch students being forcefully [sic] removed from their screaming parents. (Reg, Class A, Narrative: Survival, 13 August 2009)

Reg also agreed that Aboriginal people are good parents—particularly when he considered some of the angst he saw in the film Rabbit Proof Fence and in the Apology. Moreover, his uncertainty about whether aboriginal people are forgiving and peaceful changed to agree; overall the students’ mean levels of agreement in response to these two qualities increased from unsure to agree. Learning about the history of incidents of genocide against many Aboriginal communities in numerous regions across Australia also assisted a number of students to see Aboriginal people as forgiving and peaceful. It was particularly the viewing of the nurture and care provided by mothers and other Aboriginal elders in the film that assisted them to alter their perspectives on Aboriginal people being good parents (from unsure to just a tad below agree). Earlier lessons in which they learned about Aboriginal culture also led them to develop their perceptions about Aboriginal people in relation to
them being team-oriented (unsure to strongly agree), loving (a tad over unsure to agree) and generous (unsure to agree).

Generally speaking, the boys engaged more intently in learning about Aboriginal cultures in Unit 1 than in the emotively-oriented lessons about past and present oppressions in Units 2 and 3. In response to learning about the hunting and gathering practices, Jim for instance increased his agreement about Aboriginal people being team-oriented (unsure to agree), generous (unsure to agree) and gentle (unsure to agree), and his response to them being loving remained the same (agree to agree). At the end of Lesson 14 he also reflected that he appreciated their cultural values of looking out for one another:

I learned that they really try and hunt and gather food so everyone can eat and they won’t stop if everyone doesn’t eat [sic]. (Jim, Class B, Lesson 14 Reflection, 26 May 2010)

There were specific moments in the students’ learning that were beneficial in modifying their perceptions of the social interactions of Aboriginal people. One lesson that requires explicit mention is Lesson 16, in which Stef visited the students. Many of the students’ developing viewpoints about Aboriginal people being affectionate was enhanced as a result of meeting Stef, and listening to her stories about her culture. In response to this encounter the students increased their agreement that Aboriginal people are humorous (unsure to a tad under agree), fun-loving (a tad over unsure to agree) and gentle (unsure to agree). As discussed in Section 4.2.1, Helen shared a special moment with Stef, reflecting that it was significant for her to receive from Stef a wrist band in the Aboriginal flag colours of red, black and yellow. As a result of meeting Stef, Helen further altered some of her
preconceptions by agreeing that Aboriginal people are fun-loving, generous, friendly and a range of other qualities after having been unsure. This moment in the lesson was highly significant for me as well as for Helen. It brought the learning experience alive in a powerful way—a culmination of the program.

I had initially been surprised and concerned upon observing Helen’s responses to Surveys 1 and 2 in which she indicated her presumptions about Aboriginal people. She had believed the prejudiced views of Aboriginal people that she had heard at school and more broadly. For her, an Aboriginal person, to change her negative views was momentous for her—and me also. It was particularly momentous in light of my initial uncertainty regarding how she would feel in relation to learning about traditional Aboriginal cultures, and historical and contemporary injustices that could potentially be received adversely by her classmates. I was relieved by the respect the students showed to learning about Aboriginal people—even by those who did not change their perspectives. The program provided Helen and her peers with a platform from which she might potentially continue seeing Aboriginal people positively— their abilities, appearance, social interactions and also their societal presence.

6.4.4 Societal presence

The students’ perceptions of the societal presence of Aboriginal people—or their societal presence—are another aspect of their altered perspectives. Societal presence comprised words pertaining to how someone might be perceived as approachable and interesting, as well as their spiritual presence as captured in the qualities beautiful-spirits, godly, humble and wise. Just as this is a mixed bag of descriptive words, the students’ responses also varied. Of these qualities, the students’ opinions about Aboriginal people being humble increased the most, rising from unsure to agree.
Mary was one of many students who came to see Aboriginal people as humble; she also experienced an extensive transformation in her perspective of them being peaceful—her responses to both descriptions changed from strongly disagree to agree. Her response to wise shifted from disagree to agree. She incorporated her perceptions of them being humble, peaceful, godly and wise in her narrative writing, in which she incorporated her new knowledge of their quiet, behind-the-scenes service to the Australia community:

Time and time again there have been very positive stories, especially in the Koori Mail, that support the actions of Australian Indigenous people. (Mary, Class B, Narrative: *Dire Love*, 20 May 2010)

Similarly, Mark indicated how learning about the many Aboriginal people who have served, and continue to serve, the Australian community assisted him to agree after having been unsure that they are humble. He showed this, although reservedly, in his reflection:

I appreciate the way that many Aboriginal people have helped the Australian community. (Mark, Class A, Lesson 14 Reflection, 19 August 2009)

The students’ online research of numerous Aboriginal people who have won awards for their service to the Australian community helped Mark to agree that they are peaceful, beautiful spirits and godly, after having initially been unsure.

### 6.5 Summary and reflections

Numerous moments in the program unsettled not only the students’ prior perspectives, but also unsettled me. I found it difficult to facilitate learning moments in which students looked at their preconceptions about Aboriginal people and learned
about some of the forms of injustice they have experienced and continue to experience. My role as the facilitator was to select items and to sequence the lessons, whereas the students were at liberty to respond to them in the way that they perceived was ‘right’—which I explained to them centred on being honest. The unsettlement they experienced, and the space I gave them to experience it, was necessary for them to commence engaging as explorers on a journey of discovering aspects about Australian society and about the Aboriginal population that were new to them. They came to new realisations on their own accord, and they recognised that they alone, not me, the School, their parents or the media are in control of how they perceive Aboriginal people—which in itself was a valuable learning outcome.

There were other learning outcomes. Many of the students’ unfavourable preconceptions about Aboriginal people—that I had not previously observed and they were also largely unaware of—were challenged. The students themselves were in control of this process, which occurred as they learned new aspects about Aboriginal people that contrasted with what they had previously believed. A large proportion of students proceeded to develop new perspectives.

Using TLT as a lens to explore the ways they developed these, and what they comprised, required keeping in clear view differences between adolescents and adults. I have explored how some alteration of perspectives occurred without claiming that a perspective transformation was achieved—and particularly not what Courtenay, Merriam and Reeves (1998) suggests may be a permanent or irreversible transformation.
6.5.1 Some indications of new perspectives

While there are limitations to facilitating learning through which adolescents challenge and perhaps change their perspectives, there are also opportunities and strengths of this approach. Adolescents may not experience the depth of disorientation, discourse and alteration that adults might, but I found that they started to—to a degree—experience these components of the learning process. This study has only explored the learning of two classes of students, but it indicates that adolescents may experience these facets of the learning process. This contrasts what Mezirow (2000) reports about adults experiencing a transformation of perspectives infrequently. As adolescents are at a pliable stage in their development, they are open to and affected by the social and media discourse around them. They may be open to a new discourse presented at school, although an alteration of attitudes may be restricted to the duration of the program of learning. Further research can confirm and extend insights into how a majority of adolescents in a cohort can form new perspectives toward other ethnic groups at least in the short term, through introducing to them merely some aspects of the others’ cultures and experiences (as in the case of this study).

Indications in this study show that there was a shift in the students’ perspectives. Both before and after the program the students made favourable and unfavourable presumptions about Aboriginal people. Notably, however, while at the beginning of the program the students as a whole held more unfavourable than favourable preconceptions, at the end of the program it was the other way around. All of the students learned a lot, but while most were open to challenging and changing their perspectives some were not. The majority started to see Aboriginal people in new
ways, and for many students this commenced in Lesson 1 when viewing pictures of Aboriginal elders teaching children aspects of traditional cultures. Other new perspectives were developed gradually throughout the program, and while a few students developed theirs late, when learning about contemporary achievements of Aboriginal people, a few did not at all. While Jarvis (2011) labels this as a meaningless or ‘non-learning’ event, I contend that all students experienced meaningful learning. Those who did not alter their perspectives still learned the value of understanding people as individuals and not adhering to generalisations about the actual or perceived groups they belong to—learning that might stay with them in the future. While some students who revealed new perspectives through their engagement in the program may perhaps not hold these in the future, some students who had not during the program in time might.

A mixture of useful learning moments presented aspects about Aboriginal people that students had not seen before. Some students found that some lessons helped them to alter their perspectives more than others, but all the lessons were helpful in some ways. Lesson 1 revealed Aboriginal people as team-oriented, Lesson 2 as friendly, Lesson 3 as resilient and so on. While one lesson may not have had the same effect on one student as it did on another, the following lesson may have impacted the latter but not the former. The students’ new perspectives involved them perceiving the abilities, appearance, social interactions and societal presence of Aboriginal people. It was particularly their viewpoints about Aboriginal people in relation to their abilities and appearance that changed, and mostly in the lessons that celebrated Aboriginal cultures (Unit 1) and accomplishments (Unit 4). Their perspectives about the social interactions and societal presence of Aboriginal people were also changed,
but to a lesser degree, and mostly due to learning about Aboriginal experiences of
genocide and the forceful removal of children from their families (Unit 2) and
ongoing contemporary racism and injustice (Unit 3). In other words, learning about
Aboriginal cultures and achievements changed the students’ opinion of their tangible
qualities—their abilities and appearances, whereas commiserating with their
oppression altered their view of more intangible qualities—their social interactions
and societal presence. Perceiving Aboriginal people favourably in these ways might
also have students not laugh at or repeat racist jokes in the future, and not believe or
perpetuate stereotypes and myths about them in their conversations. Such changes in
their outlook and potentially in their behaviour are associated with altered ways of
knowing.

6.5.2 New ways of knowing

As adolescents are still developing worldviews, influenced by the opinions of
friends, family and others, they will continue to form perspectives into their
adulthood. Even in adulthood, a person continues forming new opinions and beliefs.
Accordingly, one-off anti-racism educational initiatives might have students form
new perspectives, and these may even last for a while, but follow-up programs are
required to strengthen and extend such outcomes. The students’ levels of agreement
to Aboriginal people having favourable traits were slightly lower six months after the
program than they were immediately after the program. While this shows some
medium-term effect of the program of learning and the potential of similar programs,
the slight reduction provides an indication of the need for students’ actual ways of
knowing Aboriginal people to alter in order for altered perspectives to be more long-
term. Rather than merely altering their specific perspectives, opportunity should be
given to students to alter their ways of knowing in relation to not making presumptions about Aboriginal people. They may learn that everyone is equal and a vital part of an ethnically diverse society. Also, or alternatively, they might learn to first see that Aboriginal people—and people from other cultural and ethnic groups—have favourable rather than unfavourable traits, and apply this way of knowing into the future in their social interactions.

Links were identified between students altering their specific outlooks on Aboriginal people and them changing their ways of knowing. Coming to a progressive, heightened awareness of the myriad of favourable traits made them recognise how Aboriginal people are not that much different from themselves. They identified aspects of their own personal lives that are in some ways similar to those of Aboriginal people (elaborated on in Section 4.2.2). From recognising these similarities, they better appreciated some differences. Resultantly, they pulled down walls that had stood between themselves and Aboriginal people—the ‘other’—as they began to realise there are more similarities between them and Aboriginal people than there are differences. They perceived Aboriginal people not too differently to themselves and their friends and family members.

Developing new ways of knowing comprises not only cognitive and rational responses to learning, but also the affective domain. In the context of TLT, Mezzena (2011) and Jarvis (2011) differ to Mezirow (in Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006) who place emphasis on the cognitive and rational in transformative learning. Mezzena (2011, p. 192) argues that ways of knowing ‘cannot be reduced to rationality’ but comprise the whole person. Like Dirkx (2000, 2006), Jarvis explains that transformation is not always rational but often intuitive (extra-rational) or even
irrational, that the whole person changes as part of the process of life. This current study does not explore the concept of changes in the students’ whole self, but it does look at the concept of altering cognitive and affective aspects of attitudes toward Aboriginal people.

This chapter shows that students started to understand that they should not judge Aboriginal people, or any group of people, as they saw the impact of judging others comprising cognitive and affective effects. Some students recognised the trajectory from stereotypical thinking to prejudicial feelings to discriminatory behaviour (NASP, 2013), therefore recognising that their learning is not only about cognitive development. Most recognised that there is great diversity among Aboriginal Australians, as there is among all groups of people. Recognising nuances, and understanding that every individual needs to be personally known before making presumptions is more likely to put students in a position to being open to, respectful, appreciative and inclusive of Aboriginal people.

Seeing Aboriginal people as friendly and having other favourable traits can be described as positive presumptions, preconceptions or even prejudices. The specific components of Aboriginal cultures, responses to social experiences and contributions to Australian society that they learned about can provide a lens through which they may presume favourable traits about Aboriginal people. Developing positive presumptions about Aboriginal people might balance the unfavourable representations about them presented in Australian social and media discourse. Presuming favourable traits evokes positive feelings, and although I do not explore causality in this study, the next two chapters explore the positive feelings for
Aboriginal people that students developed, which comprise new ways of feeling, including in relation to empathy.
Chapter 7  Empathy
‘Tag you’re it’, said David while touching Karri on the back.

‘Come on guys we should go now it’s getting late’, said Karri.

‘Yeah, you’re right, maybe we can go hunting with my father in the morning’, said David. ‘Okay, see you in the morning’, said Mallee.

So in the morning David and his friends got up bright and early, got their spears and then went to get David’s father Sallep for hunting. It was a cold morning, so the kids put on their dingo for jumpers [sic].

‘Hurry up kids there will be lots of kangaroos at the waterhole!’ said Sallep. They headed over to the water hole ready to catch a kangaroo. There they were with their spears in their hands, hiding in the bushes, when a strange noise came from over the hills. Everyone was scared. (Darcy, Class B, Narrative: *Interrupted*, 17 May 2010)

Following a disorientating experience (explored in Chapter 4) and while engaging in the new discourse (Chapter 5), there were numerous learning moments where students identified resemblances between some of their own social experiences and aspects of those of Aboriginal people. At the local park in Lessons 3 to 5, as they looked around the trees and creek they started to imagine Aboriginal cultural practices (detailed in Chapter 3). They played hide and seek, a game they enjoyed and understood, and later they learned that Aboriginal children also played this game prior to British settlement, and that they continue to play and enjoy it today.

Then, as they learned about the Stolen Generations, some were able to make links to their own personal experiences, such as recalling how it felt to be lost in a shopping mall, imagining, albeit limitedly, how an Aboriginal child might have felt in the first
hours of being taken away from their family. The students recognised, however, they could not fully understand the long-term impact of such forcible removal and the other aspects of injustice experienced by Aboriginal people that they learned about. Identifying and exploring such slight links assisted many students to commence considering the impact of racial prejudice and discrimination on Aboriginal people and communities, and begin the process of developing empathy towards Aboriginal people generally.

The development of empathetic engagement with Aboriginal people has the potential to have students form new ways of knowing (elaborated in Section 6.5.2). Similar to learning not to make presumptions, and first seeing the favourable traits of another person, learning to consider and perhaps also feel what the other person is feeling is perhaps a developable quality, that might possibly commence at school and continue building on into the future. This chapter presents a conceptualisation of empathy towards other people, and from this I develop a working definition from which to explore the empathic engagement of the students in this study.

7.1 Towards conceptualising and defining empathy

Empathy is a positive or pro-social response to the circumstances of another person (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004), shaping one’s cognitive and affective responses to other people. This chapter explores how the students empathising with Aboriginal people may assist them to develop new perspectives, and also, perhaps, retain these. In fact, researchers have explored how empathy may assist students to alter their perspectives—including through transformative learning experiences. Although considerably more has been said about TLT being cognitive rather than
affective, including by Mezirow (2000), Mezzenna (2011) argues that learning must comprise more than rationality, and Jarvis (2011) and Dirkx (2000, 2006) contend transformation must comprise both cognitive and affective components of learners. Some transformative learning practitioners report on the development of responses of empathy among learners, including Johnson-Bailey, Smith and Guy (2011), whose students learn about and interact with ethnic minority groups. Agarwal (2011) found that Hindu Nyayapathnk learners empathised with Muslim Nyayapathnk learners while exploring the oppressive circumstances faced by the latter (also reviewed in Section 2.3.5).

In the context of this study, this chapter considers what expressions of empathy adolescent students might develop and how these might be exhibited. Numerous anti-racism educators, including educators of children and adolescents, have explored how students may develop empathy. Empathy has specifically been developed among young children in the Roots of Empathy SEL program, through having students interact with real babies to appreciate what makes them happy and sad (Gordon, 2005) (elaborated on in Section 2.2.1). Responding empathetically is innate (Rogers et al., 2007). In relation to anti-racism education, students may consider how people who are of a different ethnicity may think, feel and respond with joy (in response to culture, community etc.) or sadness (in response to disadvantage, racism etc.). As stated previously, empathy can specifically assist students better understand the impact of whiteness and racism (Leonardo, 2004), and develop students’ appropriate functioning in society associated with feeling concern about injustice and pain experienced by others (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004).
In the specific context of this study, I kept possible difficulties or restrictions to the
students empathising with Aboriginal people in mind. It has been reported that
empathy cannot be experienced for people of a diverse culture or people who are not
personally known and people in the past (Jenkins, 1991). In order for students to
have a better understanding of Aboriginal people and their diverse cultures and
history the students used what they learnt to produce narratives from the imagined
perspective of an Aboriginal character. I am mindful that neither I, nor the students,
could fully relate to the disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal people. Like the
majority of the students in this study I am white and non-Indigenous, and do not
experience the same intergenerational disadvantages and racism that the Aboriginal
population experiences. As a white person I receive social privileges that are largely
denied to non-whites (also elaborated on by Martin-McDonald & McCarthy, 2008). I
have not experienced being judged against race-related stereotypical traits perceived
as unfavourable like Chelsea Bond’s experiences of racism, as elaborated on in
Section 2.1 (and in Southwell, Heaton & Fox, 2013). After gleaning the opinions of
Aboriginal elders and educators I could only introduce students to some past and
present cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people, and only from an external
perspective.

In light of these restrictions around the students empathising with Aboriginal people,
I explore if and how the students were able to imagine the past and present cultures
and experiences of Aboriginal people that they learned about throughout the
program. In terms of imagining, I consider if students were able to temporarily give
greater importance to the circumstances of the other person that their own. I explore
if, for a moment, students were able to find themselves in another world—in the
other’s world—particularly as they produced narratives from the perspective of an Aboriginal character. I consider links with the new National Curriculum Framework, which incorporates the development of intercultural understanding, including empathy, within numerous learning strands, including English Literacy (ACARA, 2013a). I explore whether, through their narrative writing and reflections, they were able to show recognition of, and perhaps also feelings for, the cultural practices and injustices of Aboriginal people, which comprises two overarching forms of empathy—cognitive and affective. Cognitive empathy involves knowing, or trying to know, what other people are thinking or feeling (Hodges & Klein, 2001), and affective empathy involves appropriate emotional responses (Rogers et al., 2007), or empathic concern (Lamm, Batson & Decety, 2007) (elaborated on in Section 7.1). Hodges and Klein explain that knowing what someone else is thinking and feeling allows people to engage appropriately with the other person, but empathy differs from person to person. They explain that some people never demonstrate empathy and hence struggle to interact with other people, while some on the other extreme may constantly sensitive to others’ thoughts and feelings but not to their own. Empathy can be experienced to varying degrees of intensity and levels of appropriateness (Schwartz, 2002), towards the development of moral social positions (King, 2008), and I explore the varying forms of empathy and their appropriateness and intensity.

Towards considering the expressions of empathy that the students in this study demonstrated, I further develop a clearer notion of what empathy comprises. This section presents a synthesis of aspects of empathy as presented by leading philosophers on the topic, with the concepts used in the proceeding sections in this
chapter. The concepts, definition and discussion of the students’ learning are distinguished by the two overarching forms of empathy—cognitive and affective (Rogers et al., 2007). While there is no precise definition for these two forms, there is consensus about their distinction (Cox et al., 2012).

Different philosophers place weight on different aspects of empathy. Hodges and Klein (2001) consider it can comprise caring for others, desiring to help them, experiencing emotions that match theirs, knowing what they are thinking or feeling, and not distinguishing oneself from another. Cognitive empathy involves knowing, or trying to know, what Aboriginal people are thinking or feeling King (2008) attributes moral motivation as key to empathy—a motivation and set of attitudes that is found internal and external of the empathiser.

The two distinct forms of empathy provide insight into what empathy comprises. The first is cognitive empathy, which encompasses an innate capacity to recognise and perhaps understand another’s perspective or mental state (Rogers et al., 2007). Davis (1983, p. 97) explains such empathy can involve taking ‘spontaneous attempts to adopt the perspectives of other people and see things from their point of view’, and also fantasy, comprising identifying with characters in fictional situations. The second is affective empathy, or emotional empathy, involving understanding the emotional states of other people, or responding with appropriate emotions to another’s mental state (Rogers et al., 2007). This form of empathy can be understood as an empathic concern—a sympathy and compassion for others in response to their suffering (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Lamm, Batson & Decety, 2007; Minio-Paluello et al., 2009; Rogers et al., 2007). It can also be expressed in the form of personal distress—which Batson, Fultz and Schoenrade (1987) and Rogers et al. (2007) state
can comprise either other-oriented or self-oriented feelings of discomfort and anxiety in response to another’s suffering. Lamm, Batson and Decety (1987, p. 57) in emphatic concern results in either altruistic motivation or to personal distress and egoistic motivation, the response dependent on self–other differentiation.

Minio-Paluello et al. (2009, p. 1749) explain there is no consensus regarding whether personal distress is a response of empathy or not, and specifically state is:

Empathy is a process where another person’s mental state (which include intentions, desires, emotions and proprioceptive states) automatically activates in the observer a representation of the observed state.

This chapter takes the position that responses of moral indignation (also elaborated on in Section 4.2.3) are a pro-social feeling of empathy.

Drawing upon these concepts, I have personally developed the following definition—stemming cognitive and affective forms of empathy—for exploratory use in this chapter into the students’ cognitive and affective empathetic responses to Aboriginal people:

Empathy comprises appropriately recognising, imagining, understanding, supporting and/or (partially) experiencing the other person’s thoughts, feelings and/or actions.

I explore the intensity and appropriateness of students’ empathetic thoughts and feelings toward Aboriginal people in their engagement in the program. I explore how at the same time they developed new perspectives about Aboriginal people (partially explored in Chapter 6) and also developed other new feelings (elaborated on further
in Chapter 8). This chapter specifically explores their capacity to imagine the viewpoints of Aboriginal people through narrative writing, before my reflections and suggestions for teachers and researchers to continue to investigate the value of anti-racism education in middle schools are presented in Chapter 9.

7.2 Expressions of cognitive empathy among students

As the students engaged in the program of learning they exhibited numerous examples of cognitive empathy for Aboriginal people. Based on the concepts of cognitive empathy elaborated on above, I found the students’ cognitive empathy comprised recognising the possible perspectives and feelings of Aboriginal people, and imagining or taking the perspective of the experiences of another person. I explore how the first—recognising another’s perspectives or feelings—involved them developing or extending their possibly innate capacity to recognise and perhaps understand some of another’s perspective or mental state (Decety in Decety & Jackson, 2004; Rogers et al., 2007), and the knowing the other’s thoughts or feelings—or both (Hodges & Klein, 2001). The ways the students then engaged in imagining or taking the perspective of the experiences of some Aboriginal people is considered, which refers to a inclination to ‘adopt’ another persons’ perspectives (Davis, 1983; Rogers et al., 2007). According to Rogers et al. (2007), it can also involve a tendency to imagine oneself as another person (including someone who is not personally known), and I consider in this section whether students were able to attain this form of empathy. In alignment with the definition of empathy that I provided in Section 7.1, Section 7.3 will explore if students understood and particularly experienced or shared any feelings for Aboriginal people—such as joy when they might feel joy or sorrow when they might feel sorrow. This section first
explores if they appropriately recognised, imagined and supported their possible thoughts, feelings and actions.

The students’ engagement in empathy commenced at what Rogers et al. (2007) describes as its most sophisticated cognitive form—imagining the circumstances of Aboriginal people. This was predominantly exhibited through their creative, imaginative narrative writing. From what they perceived might be the perspective of an Aboriginal character in response to what was learned about in class, the students progressively added a paragraph to their creative narratives at the close of most of the lessons in the program, in class and then they completed this for homework. Responding to the lessons in this way provided the students with the opportunity to consolidate and articulate their perspectives about Aboriginal people in relation to their perceived traits, and their perceptions of what Aboriginal people might be thinking and feeling in response to their circumstances. The students were in control of the imaginative process of considering Aboriginal people’s perspectives and feelings about their historical and contemporary circumstances. This imagining involved taking the creative liberty of giving the Aboriginal character in their narratives a personality, with most selecting Aboriginal names for their character and the community where their stories were set. Olivia chose the name Tathra, which is Pitjantjatjara for beautiful country, and Peter introduced his character as being from the fictional town of Port Willabaroo. I found that the students had an ability—often unprompted—to consider the diverse viewpoints of Aboriginal people and incorporate these into their stories. They developed a willingness to see how Aboriginal people perceive various issues, which moved them towards better recognising their possible perspectives and feelings.
7.2.1 Recognising possible perspectives and feelings

As the students engaged in the program of learning they developed numerous forms of cognitive empathy for Aboriginal people—that Stein (1989) categorises as a foreign consciousness, involving knowing a world outside our own senses. Based on the concepts of cognitive empathy elaborated on in Section 7.1, and concepts of empathy in transformative learning among adults and anti-racism education among children and adolescents reviewed in Section 2.3.5, I explore how students first recognised the possible perspectives or feelings of Aboriginal people that they held. I start with Decety’s (in Decety & Jackson, 2004) and Rogers et al.’s (2007) notion of empathy—an innate capacity to recognise and perhaps understand another’s perspective or mental state (whilst differentiating one’s own feelings from the other person’s), and similarly Hodges & Klein’s (2001) definition of knowing another’s thinking or feelings. I contend that there is no way the students could completely relate to (or assume to fully relate to) the thoughts and feelings of Aboriginal people, particularly surrounding their experiences of social injustice. Rather, I propose that students could consider the possible thoughts and feelings Aboriginal people might experience in light of learning about cultures and experiences of injustice.

The ability—or the tendency (Rogers et al., 2007)—of students in both Classes A and B to consider the thoughts and feelings of Aboriginal people was gradual and progressive throughout the program of learning. Initially, students developed simple expressions of cognitive empathy as they imagined the life of Aboriginal people in relation to their cultures (Unit 1), past experiences of social injustices (Unit 2) and present experiences of social injustices (Unit 3), as well as contemporary achievements (Unit 4). From early on in the program, the students developed a
foreign consciousness (Stein, 1989)—an external awareness or knowing a world outside our own senses—of the cultural practices of Aboriginal communities. Their peripheral cognition of Aboriginal cultures and lifestyles was enhanced as they imagined being an Aboriginal person, as evidenced in their narrative writing. From viewing images and reviewing accounts of the hunting, gathering and culinary technology and techniques of Aboriginal people, students increased their ability to imagine the life of Aboriginal people. Numerous learning moments assisted the students to recognise possible joys and sorrows. Playing hide and seek at the local park in Lesson 4 was a particularly rich learning moment that moved many of the students to recognise the joys that may have been experienced in past and present Aboriginal communities. Reg’s narrative showed a sense of enjoyment, blending learning from Lessons 1 and 4:

Back when we were kids we would play lots of games together. We would have so much fun running down the big sand dunes. Our mothers would teach us the art of track-making, which isn’t as hard as it looks, all you have to do is learn what tracks are which. Every now and again we would sit with our fathers and other men and learn spear throwing skills. We would throw the spear at a paddy melon that we found somewhere. At the end of the day nearing dark we would sometimes perform a dance for everyone. (Reg, Class A, Narrative: Survivor, 14 August 2009)

Learning about cultural skills and practices in Lesson 2 also assisted students to perceive Aboriginal people’s possible thoughts and feelings, and to appreciate these skills and practices. Their capacity to do so was somewhat innate; Rogers et al. (2007) suggests the capacity to recognise and perhaps understand another’s
perspective or mental state should be innate. Dan’s empathetic story-writing involved him assuming the love Aboriginal people might have for their natural surrounds and engagement in tasks to help their community:

My people loved the land, the sea and all its creatures. We lived in this land for thousands of years. I would do many tasks for my family. They were very fun but also required me to be very responsible for my age. I would have had to do many things, like catching mud crabs for the tribe. This task is a very tiring task because of the aggression that the crabs show when they protect themselves, as we similarly our little ones [sic]. But when it is done the whole tribe can enjoy a beautiful meal of mud crab. (Dan, Class A, Narrative: Survivor, 14 August 2009)

Dan also incorporated his perspective of the hard work of Aboriginal people in engaging in these tasks, as well as the great skill involved and the generosity within Aboriginal communities of sharing the catch with other community members—which conflicted with some of their prior views about them not being generous and team-oriented (presented in Section 4.1). Dan perceived their environmental-mindedness, and indicated at the end of the program that he now saw them as responsible and talented. Most of the students experienced such demonstration of empathy, and indicated that they altered their perception of Aboriginal people in relation to these and other favourable traits.

Perceiving the possible feelings of Aboriginal people in response to injustices learned about in Units 2 and 3 was also often innate to the large majority (if not all) of the students. Other educators of children and adolescents similarly report how learning about other ethnic groups and their experiences of injustice can evoke
responses of empathy. For instance, from learning about the impact of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, the primary school students in Au’s (2007) class cognitively reflected on the thoughts and feelings they imagined the Japanese people may have had. Such empathetic engagement can lead to the alteration of students’ perspectives. As mentioned earlier, from a TLT context, Agarwal (2011) reports that Hindu Nyayapathnk students engage in empathy in ways that can be likened to in-thinking the circumstances of Muslim Nyayapathnk students, towards seeing them in new, favourable ways.

The students in this study responded to what they learned in Unit 2 about historical injustices experienced by Aboriginal people to recognise the pain associated with subjugation, but also to perceive and appreciate their strength of character in response to oppression. The students developed their narratives in the same sequence as they engaged in the program—celebrating the joys of Aboriginal cultures before commiserating with the pain of events during and following colonisation of Australia. They often recognised the emotions that Aboriginal people might experience—appropriate in-thinking suggested by Decety (in Decety & Jackson, 2004, p. 97) as a true demonstration of empathy. Faith’s narrative writing was not dissimilar to most of her classmates, and showed her recognition of the thoughts and feelings that Aboriginal people quite possibly experienced:

My mum quickly hid me in the hole and all the other mothers ran to get their children to hide them too. But it was too late, the men were already out the car and ran and took the other kids that weren’t hidden. While I was hiding I could hear all the mothers screaming and the men shouting ‘HAND THEM OVER!’

It made tears run down my face hearing all this and I was shaking so much that
even my legs couldn’t stay still. I was terrified and scared they were going to find me.

When they were gone we could see that I was the only kid left. All the mothers were bawling their eyes out and screaming. My mother was happy that I wasn’t taken, but terribly upset for the other children and their parents. From then on we never heard from those children. (Faith, Class B, Narrative: Run, 18 May 2010)

Viewing the film Rabbit Proof Fence in Lesson 6 assisted Faith and her classmates to imagine the experience of Aboriginal children who were taken by the government, and of their families who were left without them. This recognition of the damaging effect of past racist government policy assisted them to, in varying forms, see the perspective of some Aboriginal people.

Varied literature details how middle school students may also empathise with contemporary victims of racism. Ellwood (2007) reports on students learning about how a Puerto Rican boy hesitated to help a white woman who was juggling groceries, a baby and a pram disembark a train because of the racism he had experienced. They appreciated his hesitation to help was due to concern that the action may be misinterpreted, as Puerto Ricans are stereotyped as thieves and aggressive by the white community. Jenkins’ (1991) conceptualises empathy as less readily experienced for people in the past than the present. However, I found that the students in this current study empathised equally with contemporary and historical injustices. Jenkins also considers that empathy cannot occur if the person is not personally known. Again, despite not being known by the students, there did not appear to be restrictions to them empathising with Aboriginal people in relation to
the learning about their cultures and experiences of injustice. However, there were limitations to the students understanding their cognitive and emotional state (Schwartz, 2002) in relation to the vastly different past and personal cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people. As Unit 2 (focused on past injustices of Aboriginal people) switched to Unit 3 (on present day experiences), students were able to apply aspects of modern culture and technologies into their narratives.

As the students learned about the race-related disadvantages faced by Aboriginal people in the twenty first century, they began to better understand their angst in response to oppression. This may in some ways be similar to what de Waal (2008) describes as assessing the causes of another’s distress, and also feeling some emotions that may in some ways be similar to the other’s. Students responded to Unit 3 by not only producing creative narratives but also critical expositions; Alan recognised the ‘heartache’ and ‘pain’ of Aboriginal people in response to past and present racism:

> My people the Aboriginals experienced lots of heartache in the past from racism and sadly it still continues today not in the form of our children being taken but in attacking us both in physical attacks and calling us names but still this can cause me and the other Aboriginals great pain [sic]. One of the more disgraceful things is the myths how they say we get advantages that we don’t so people get angrier at us [sic]. (Alan, Class B, Exposition: Social Injustice, 27 May 2010)

From his engagement in the lessons and particularly from his attempts to perceive the social injustices experienced by Aboriginal people, Alan also increasingly appreciated the frustration many might feel upon experiencing racism. He
simultaneously valued that despite social injustices, Aboriginal people remain amiable and approachable, and many of his classmates responded in similar ways.

The concept of appropriately recognising and imagining the possible thoughts, feeling and actions of Aboriginal people continued to be evident, and became more real (as it was toward living people) in many of the students’ responses to contemporary racism. Jim had initially perceived Aboriginal people to be angry, but in response to learning about their daily experiences with racism he understood and appreciated that they are not upset at other Australians but at the injustices they face. The anger of some Aboriginal people towards racism and injustice made more sense to him. In his narrative (an extract presented in Section 6.2.2) he demonstrates his understanding of how it may feel to be prejudged and discriminated against on a daily basis, which ‘just really ruins your day, and you feel as though no one appreciates you for who you are’.

Students developed cognitive empathy throughout the program—including in response to learning about their accomplishments in Unit 4—expressed as support for Aboriginal people. The students appreciated the resilience of Aboriginal people and their commitment to the nation despite the injustice and racism they experienced, including during the nation’s World War I and II efforts. Robert was one of numerous students who cognitively empathised with Aboriginal people in light of their dedication to and ‘love’ of Australia despite not being counted as Australian citizens:

We love this country as much as the next person. We fought in both of the world wars for Australia but we get nothing for that because Aboriginal people back then were not classed as Australian citizens which disappoints me
because our ancestors were on this land before these people were even born [sic]. (Robert, Class B, Narrative: My People, 19 May 2010)

The lesson in Unit 4 about Aboriginal Australian war heroes helped students to empathise with Aboriginal people due to the importance placed on remembrance of war-time efforts by the nation—young and old. However, long before this lesson, from as early as Unit 1, and particularly in Units 2 and 3, the students had started to demonstrate cognitive empathy by recognising the possible perspectives or feelings of Aboriginal people. The next section explores the second component of cognitive empathy—imagining or taking the perspective of Aboriginal people’s experiences.

7.2.2 Imagining or taking another’s perspective

Davis (1983) and Rogers et al. (2007) explain that imagining or taking the perspective of Aboriginal people involves the tendency to ‘adopt’ the others’ perspectives. According to Rogers et al. (2007), it can also involve a tendency to imagine oneself as another person (including someone who is not personally known). This section discusses whether students were able to attain this form of sophisticated empathy. Educators of children as well as adults report how such expressions of empathy can be developed among students. Christensen (2007) engaged her primary school students in monologues that moved them to look beyond their own lives to take the perspective of people who have experienced social oppression. In a TLT context, Zourna (2010) achieved similar outcomes among adult students by facilitating opportunities for them to consider the adverse circumstances of fictitious characters. From observing reality from the character’s perspective, Zourna found that some students altered their opinions or perspectives about the characters.
I found that the students in my study imagined the perspectives of Aboriginal people relatively early on, and proceeded to develop and exhibit deeper forms of empathy throughout their engagement in the program. Some students appeared to recognise the perspectives of Aboriginal people from the first lesson to the last, and incorporated these perspectives into their imaginative writing. This form of empathy was not only evident in their narrative writing but also in their expositions and reflections. For instance, at the end of the program, Emma reflected:

The disadvantage experienced by these people was and is countless [sic]. Some of the lessons that helped me change my perspective were Tanya’s visit, the media unfairness, NAIDOC award winners and Stef’s visit. These lessons helped me immensely to change my thoughts toward these people. The lesson where we learnt and read about the apology speech helped me to realise that these things were publicly asked for forgiveness [sic]. Watching Rabbit Proof Fence developed a liking in me. The movie showed me that Aboriginal people are fun loving, good parents and very long suffering. I learnt that racism is hurtful and will hurt a person for life [sic]. In the story of Nungala my perspective was further changed as I found out what students had gone through in the Stolen Generations [sic]. All of the lessons helped me change my outlook of Aboriginal people dramatically. Without them, I would still be afraid and have a negative perspective of the Aboriginal people [sic]. (Emma, Class B, 28 May 2010)

Emma presumed an Aboriginal perspective to recognise the many forms of disadvantage and racism directed towards Aboriginal people, including by the media, and the strength of character shown by Aboriginal people in response to this. This
greatly assisted her to move away from the ‘distance’ and the ‘fear’ that she had initially indicated she had felt. She also reflected on her new found perspective about how the stereotypes about Aboriginal people that she indicated are prevalent in news reports.

There were some lessons in particular that assisted the students to consider the perspectives of Aboriginal people and better understand their social experiences, particularly learning about the contemporary disadvantage Aboriginal people experience in terms of education, employment, housing and health learned about in Lesson 8. Numerous students, including Robert whose cognitive empathy was realised in response to learning about their war efforts, wrote their narratives from what they perceived to be the perspective of an Aboriginal people—creatively articulating the experiences of social injustice that they learned Aboriginal people continue to experience. Robert took an Aboriginal perspective in relation to the inequality he learned they experience in the areas of education, employment, health, housing and other life outcomes:

It’s time the government takes action. Did you know my people and I are three times more likely to get a heart disease, seven times more likely to receive Hep A and five times more likes to receive Hep B? [sic] This is scary for my people [sic]. Also in our rural area our employment rate is twice as less as non-Aboriginal people [sic]. I believe some of these things are caused by racism [sic]. (Robert, Class B, Narrative: My People, 20 May 2010)

From taking the perspective of Aboriginal people, not only did Robert support the fact that many of the experiences of Aboriginal people are embedded in injustice, but
also that there is a need for government action to stem such injustice. This support, echoed by numerous of his classmates, was his own initiative.

To a degree Robert and some of his classmates demonstrated what Rogers et al. (2007) describe as the refined process of imagining themselves as the other person (Aboriginal people)—despite them not being personally known by them. They did so in response to learning about other aspects of the oppression experienced by Aboriginal people in the past and into the present day. Cindy demonstrated cognitive empathy in the form of imagining the experiences of Aboriginal people as she wrote her narrative. While her narrative writing showed her support for social justice for Aboriginal people in relation to fair and non-stereotypical news and other media reporting, her exposition writing took this further as she took her own personal perspective rather than presuming the perspective of Aboriginal people:

I believe in fairness and justice for all people in news reporting. Whether we see stories on the television and internet or read them in the newspaper, or are told them [sic] by friends and family, not all stories should be taken into account [sic]. Although many stories that you may hear might be true and accurate, there are certain considerations that should be given when observing a news story about an Aboriginal person or community. Unfortunately we often only hear the negative stories about Aboriginal people and communities, and not many positive stories, which in turn transforms society’s outlook on different people groups [sic]. Some of the stories in the media deeply impact every person’s ways [sic]. (Cindy, Class B, Exposition: Unfair, 25 May 2010)
Cindy’s unique expression of support for Aboriginal people was evident in her use of the word ‘unfortunately’ when describing the ‘negative stories’ about them, and shows recognition of the impact of racism, specifically stereotypical news reporting, on Aboriginal people.

However, for the main part the students’ narrative writing was from the perspective of what they imagined to be the thoughts and feelings of Aboriginal Australians, which provided for many strongly empathetic responses. Toni’s writing, for example, revealed her recognition of the ‘cycle of oppression’ students learned about in Lesson 8, and her empathy with Aboriginal people amidst these circumstances:

My people die 17 year younger than other Australians. I have lost many brothers and sisters. I am tired of burying loved ones. In rural areas our unemployment levels are twice as high as those of anyone else. At work the other day I saw somebody treating my friend like they were a piece of dirt. When will all this end? [Toni, Class B, Exposition: My People, 21 May 2010]

It is evident in this and numerous other reflections and creative and critical components from narratives and expositions from Toni and other students that they were developing a passion for justice for Aboriginal people. This comprised a strong part of their affective empathy with Aboriginal people.

7.3 Expressions of affective empathy

Appropriate understanding, supporting and in some ways experiencing the feelings and actions of Aboriginal people was shown by some students as they developed affective empathy, which was mostly evident in their narrative writing. Soft skills associated with affective empathy have been reported to be developed among adults
in transformative learning experiences, and Fourcade, Krichewsky and Sumputh (2010) explain that such development is desirable and necessary in the social development of learners. This section explores the extent and the ways students were able to develop and exhibit these expressions in light of the concepts of empathy presented in Section 7.1. The expressions comprised feeling emotions in general for the circumstances of Aboriginal people, and those that are specific and perhaps comparable to the feelings of Aboriginal people.

Affective or emotional empathy that involves feeling emotions in general for another person’s circumstances is understood in this section to comprise better understanding the emotional states of another person and responding with appropriate emotions to their mental state (Rogers et al., 2007). It is seen to comprise feeling empathic concern—a sympathy and compassion for others in response to their suffering (Minio-Paluello et al., 2009; Rogers et al., 2007). Feeling emotions that are similar to those of another person can also comprise empathic concern in the form of personal distress, which Rogers et al. (2007) argue (but I disagree) involves feelings of discomfort and anxiety in response to the other’s suffering that are self-centred. While I think that personal distress can be a self-centred response, I think (at least in the context of this study) distress involves an empathic concern for and with the other person in light of their circumstances.

Some educators of children and adolescents report how students can start to affectively empathise with people of other ethnicities. Bigelow and Diamond (2006) observed the primary school students in their classes altering their views about people of other ethnic groups resulted after they had critically reflected on their social circumstances. From first critically considering and weighing social injustices
and misuses of government power, the students reflected on how they would feel if in the other’s circumstances. Bigelow (2007a) also found that the students in his class felt deeply for a young man who they learned had his military service extended by the US Government by a further 25 years despite having already served his time at war. In this study, the empathy the students felt involved them feeling emotions for Aboriginal people in light of their past and present circumstances. They responded to what they learned about with sensitivity and respect, and demonstrated appropriate emotions according to how they perceived Aboriginal people may feel now, or may have felt in the past. This section explores two forms of affective empathy—first, feeling emotions for another’s circumstances, and second, feeling emotional connectivity.

7.3.1 Feeling emotions for another person’s circumstances

The students felt a range of emotions for Aboriginal people—particularly as they learned about past and present injustices. This section explores these learning moments, whereas Section 7.3.2 explores emotions experienced that were possibly similar to those of the Aboriginal people they learned about. These moments predominantly involved learning about the past injustices of Aboriginal people—experiences of genocide of communities and the forcible removal of children from their parents. I first observed students feeling emotions in general for the circumstances of Aboriginal people, in their response to learning about the genocide experienced at Slaughterhouse Creek and Myall Creek Station (see Section 5.1). They started to attempt to perceive the emotional effect on Aboriginal people, and felt strong emotions in response to these atrocities. Jon, for example, reflected at the end of Lesson 5 on how he felt about the genocide of Aboriginal people:
I felt gutted and horrible. (Jon, Class B, Lesson 5 Reflection, 12 May 2010)

While this could possibly show a self-centred personal distress, it could also be a feeling for Aboriginal people. The students could not feel like a victim of racism in the context of the social experiences of Aboriginal people in Australia due to having not been born into race related discrimination and disadvantage (in comparison to the Aboriginal people they learned about). However, numerous students still reflected on the emotions that they started to feel (elaborated on further in Chapter 8). Although they cognitively recognised that they were personally not Aboriginal, and have not experienced the disadvantages that they were learning about, I observed that some of them wrote their stories deeply imagining being Aboriginal, and feeling strong emotions as they did so. Some experienced joy when learning about Aboriginal cultures, capturing this in their narrative writing, and some felt upset from learning about the oppression experienced by Aboriginal people. Some students reflected that they felt hopeless and saddened about the racism and other injustices experienced by Aboriginal people. It appeared that they did not just write their narratives and expositions because they had to do, but because they wanted to articulate their developing feelings for Aboriginal people and against injustice. David, for example, imagined himself as an Aboriginal man witnessing his wife dying, and narrated how the ‘horror set in’ and he ‘couldn’t hold back the tears’ as ‘it felt like someone had driven a spear through my heart’:

I awake to the scream of a female as the horror set in. I realised my wife was gone. I rush out of the bed and looked around, to see my wife on the ground bleeding. I rushed to her only to see that she was dead. I couldn’t believe it, the love of my life is dead and I thought to myself if anyone else was hurt [sic]. I
went around the camp only to Gordon, the only one there, sleeping [sic]. I awoke Gordon to tell him the news. He apologised for my loss and he aided to give her a proper burial. We dug her a grave [sic] and buried her. I couldn’t hold back the tears. It felt like someone had driven a spear through my heart.

(David, Class B, Narrative: *My Journey*, 18 May 2010)

Reg also expressed deep empathy in his narrative writing, in which he displayed feelings that he perceived Aboriginal people would experience. As elaborated on in Section 6.4.3, he placed particular attention on the heartbreak he perceived would have been felt by Aboriginal children and parents during and after the former being forcefully removed from the latter. In his story writing Reg demonstrated a capacity to share an appropriate, respectful response to the unique experiences of another person and group of people. This response was combined with his increasing awareness of how they have resiliently forged ahead in life.

Liam was also sensitive to the cultures and the experiences of Aboriginal people. He incorporated what he learned, and moreover what he felt, as he engaged in the learning process to celebrate Aboriginal cultures and also commiserate with Aboriginal people in relation to oppression. In his narrative writing he predominantly focused on past experiences of injustice with great creativity and imagination:

Together we ran down to Chum’s hut, and to our surprise he was already dressed and ready to go. We were going to test out the tracking skills that we had learned from the elders by going on a hunt on our own to catch a turkey.

The sun had completely set now and the sky was filled with stars.
Early in the morning when I woke up in the deep forest with my family we heard a loud bang. My spine shuddered as we saw the white men come down the hill with the big shiny spears that fire shiny bees [*sic*]. My heart sank as they shot my friend Louis. I rush to help him but my parents hold me back. I yelled but they covered my mouth and made me follow them. (Liam, Class B, Narrative: *I am Aboriginal*, 21 May 2010)

Liam’s capacity to feel for Aboriginal people in light of their past and present circumstances commenced with him appreciating their cultures and resilience in the face of adversity, and accordingly agreeing that they are talented and peaceful after having initially disagreed. The respectful and sensitive response that he and other students showed was synonymous with them demonstrating appropriate emotional responses to the experiences of Aboriginal people.

As they extended their insight into what many Aboriginal people have gone through, students respected their fight for justice, equality and recognition. This was evident in Charles’ reflections about historical and contemporary injustices:

I also know many things that has happened to them such as the Stolen Generations and killing and even the things that happen today that disadvantage them such as housing, jobs, racism and many other things, and I appreciate that they are still among and are now citizens as they fought politically for their freedom as citizens of their own country now known as Australia [*sic*]. (Charles, Class A, 21 August 2009)

This and numerous other reflections and snippets of narrative and expository writing showed many of the students’ growing empathic concern—described as a sympathy
and compassion for others in response to their suffering (Minio-Paluello et al., 2009; Rogers et al., 2007). Narrative writing assisted Claire and others to feel for the Aboriginal people they learned about, and to modify their views of them as a result. Claire reflected:

I was able to express my creativity, while feeling the pain, hurt and love at the same time. I feel the same way about my exposition, being able to express my feelings and thoughts through words. (Claire, Class A, 21 August 2009)

These and other expressions of affective empathy showed me that many of the students were starting to increasingly or progressively understand the other's (Aboriginal peoples') emotional responses (Rogers et al., 2007). The students’ emotions in response to these perceptions about Aboriginal people were heart-felt and appropriate (Rogers et al., 2007), and comprised a clear empathic concern for another group of people in response to their oppression (Lamm, Batson & Decety, 2007; Minio-Paluello, et al., 2009; Rogers et al., 2007). These aspects of empathy were felt all the more as they felt emotions that could be perceived as the same types of emotions (but felt in different ways) to those of Aboriginal people.

7.3.2 Feeling an emotional connectivity

The students’ affective empathy was also often expressed as feeling an emotional connectivity with Aboriginal people. This section explores the ways students considered the circumstances of Aboriginal people to experience some similar emotions—for instance feeling sad for Aboriginal people when learning about upsetting circumstances. Decety and Meyer (2008) explain that such similar feelings can be felt, but with the empathiser not losing sight of whose feelings belong to who.
Many students responded to the Aboriginal people they learned about with empathic concern, including in the form of personal distress, which according to Rogers et al. (2007) is a self-centred feeling, but can also be others-centred, pro-social response. I explore this expression of affective empathy as not distinguishing oneself from the other person, but as experiencing emotions that match the other’s emotions (elaborated on by Hodges & Klein, 2001). I explore how such affective empathy can involve students feeling, understanding and supporting the other person’s feeling and actions. Emphasis is placed on the students starting to identify the similarities they share with Aboriginal people (also elaborated on in Section 4.2.2), and, in some ways, relating to them. This section also looks at how students commenced feeling deep emotion, and wanted to take action which, similar to identifying similarities and identifying with Aboriginal people, resulted in acceptance and sympathy—expressions of allophilia explored in Chapter 8.

The development of affective empathy can move students to experience transformative learning. For instance, Magos (2010, p. 19) reports that after a student in his class learned about social injustices experienced by immigrants in Greece, she reflected, ‘I feel like something turned around inside me … I felt stunned and angered’. Magos elaborates on the students’ tendency to identify with and support the women who they learned face oppression from male-oriented social institutions. To do this they combined their observation of the others’ experiences with their own personal memory, knowledge and reasoning (Ickes, 1997), towards affectively empathising with the other women. Ickes (1997) elaborates that empathic accuracy refers to how accurately one person can infer the psychological states, or thoughts and feelings, of another person. This learning was transformative, with one learner in
Magos’ study reflecting that the lessons ‘shook me drastically’ and ‘made me view immigrants in a way that I had never viewed them before’ (1997, p. 20).

The adolescent-aged students in this study experienced a range of responses, from being astonished at past events of genocide in Lesson 5 to being upset by biased media reporting that stereotypes Aboriginal people and communities in Lesson 11. Beth reflected on how she felt emotions very strongly, including when learning about genocide against Aboriginal communities, which ‘disgusted’ her:

I felt upset about the massacre that had happened. I never knew about this before and I am disgusted. (Beth, Class B, Lesson 5 Reflection, 12 May 2010)

However the students often did more than simply feel strong emotions for Aboriginal people—they often also felt an affiliation with them. Some students also developed some feelings that in some ways may have been similar to those of Aboriginal people, which often commenced with identifying similarities they share with them—what de Waal (2008) refers to as identifying with the other person and also, at times and in some contexts, experiencing some feelings that are similar to the other person’s. Ickes (1987) explains this can involve the empathiser blending personal memories, knowledge, observations and reasoning with the person who is empathised with, although she or he keeps in mind that the other person’s circumstance and emotional responses cannot be experienced, and cannot be fully understood. Verma started to ‘warm up’ to Aboriginal people, and accept them and their experiences, and also increasingly felt ‘a change of sympathy and a special acceptance and affection’.
What was often involved in this process of identifying similarities they share with Aboriginal people was feeling in some ways similar to them. However, it cannot be concluded that just because students wrote from the perspective of an Aboriginal person that they actually thought and felt the same way as them. I did observe though, that some students were able to deeply engage with the people they learned about—perhaps similar to the learning experiences of adolescents elaborated on by Bigelow (2007a). Bigelow found that the students in his class readily took another person’s position through imagining the discrimination they face. The students in this study identified aspects of their own personal lives with aspects of Aboriginal cultures and experiences. Their enjoyment of playing the game hide and seek, and learning that Aboriginal children enjoyed and continue to enjoy the same game assisted them to extend an affective connectivity to Aboriginal people in general. Also, the students imagined (partially) how an Aboriginal child might feel in the first hours of being taken away from their family, as they recalled and compared to personal incidents of being separated temporarily from their own parents, particularly when they were younger. In doing this, however, they recognised that they could not fully relate to the long-term impact of such forcible removal as well as to the other injustices experienced by Aboriginal people that they learned about. Identifying and exploring such slight resemblances assisted many students to commence considering the impact of racial prejudice and discrimination on Aboriginal people and communities, enhancing their empathetic engagement.

Drawing slight resemblance between personal experiences and imagining how they might feel if they experienced the injustices that they learned Aboriginal people have faced, helped the students to better relate to some of the feelings that Aboriginal
people may have had. Catherine, for instance, reasoned that the experiences of Aboriginal people that she learned about may well evoke similar responses from her if she were to encounter similar events. She remembered how in the past she had cried herself to sleep when upset, and creatively directed her lead Aboriginal character in her narrative to do the same upon experiencing forcible separation. She could not relate to such an ordeal—she, like her classmates, had not been separated from their family, and particularly not forcibly. She did, however, incorporate her own personal experience of crying herself to sleep, but contrasted these to the ‘good times’ of engaging in cultural practices and community activities:

When the time came to close our eyes I would usually cry myself to sleep, but then remember the good times when my family and I would go and look for bush tucker and just play on the steep sand hills. To this day I desperately want to go back there. (Catherine, Class B, Narrative: Childhood Lost, 19 May 2010)

Some of the students’ emotional expressions of empathy for Aboriginal people were very deep. Britney reflected on how she wrote her story with deep emotion as she imagined how she might feel if she experienced such adversity:

This story made me feel very emotional as I wrote it (emotion) in the story very deeply … I felt what I wrote was what I would have done if I was her. (Britney, Class A, 21 August 2009)

While the focus of the program of learning involved facilitating opportunity for students to challenge their perspectives about, and feelings toward, Aboriginal people, some students wanted to go a step further and actually start to take action to stop racism. Numerous anti-racism educators report such learning outcomes in the
initiatives they facilitate. Ellwood (2007), Bigelow (2007a) and Christensen (2007) report that taking action readily follows such learning (reviewed in Section 2.2). Some of the students in this study, including Rosa, expressed their desire to ‘do something’ about what they were learning about. Rosa wanted to take action specifically after affectively empathising with Aboriginal people in response to the disrespect and violence some have encountered:

I think they were treated with disrespect and violence just because they looked different many people receive racism and it makes them feel angry and upset. I wish I could do something to change this. (Rosa, Class B, 28 May 2010)

7.4 Summary and reflections

At least temporarily, numerous students placed greater importance on the circumstances of Aboriginal people than on their own. For a moment they found themselves in another world—in the other’s world—particularly as they produced narratives from the perspective of an Aboriginal character. It was predominantly through their narrative writing that many students appropriately recognised, imagined, understood and in some ways shared the perspectives, feeling and actions of Aboriginal people. Their narratives were produced to encapsulate the cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people in the same sequence as these cultures and experiences were presented through program. The program and the students’ empathetic engagement with Aboriginal people was a chronological celebration of the joys of Aboriginal cultures followed by a commiseration with the pain of events subsequent to the colonisation of Australia. Students were in control of their learning, the pilots of their empathetic engagement and imaginative writing.
With this freedom, the students not only developed new views of Aboriginal people in relation to their specific traits (elaborated on in Section 6.4), but developed new ways of knowing (see Section 6.5.2). This chapter has explored how students not only developed new ways to think but also new ways to feel—particularly in developing a tendency to empathise with Aboriginal people. I argue that, like learning not to prejudge another group of people, learning to empathise provided a platform from which students formed new and more positive perspectives about Aboriginal people, which may be longer-term than only developing some specific perceptions of particular traits (these traits are elaborated on in Section 6.4). There was some resemblance with the place of empathy in transformative learning, but these areas of resonance are limited by considerably less emphasis on the role of the affective as compared to that of cognition and rationality. From some TLT studies and other anti-racism educational studies among school-aged students, some resonance has been explored in relation to the cognitive and affective forms of empathy that the students developed through their engagement in the program of learning.

Despite the students not knowing Aboriginal people, their responses of empathy with them as they (seemingly for the first time) learned about some aspects of their cultures and experiences of social injustice was relatively innate. Although Jenkins (1991) reports that empathising with people from by-gone eras is not instinctive and often not possible, the students did not appear to empathise with Aboriginal people in light of the injustices in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries any less than they did in response to the forms of racism they experience in the twenty first century. However, Jenkins’ point is valid; there are limitations to accurately
understanding the cognitive and emotional state of others in the past due in relation to vastly different past and personal cultures and experiences. I agree that complete understanding of the others’ circumstances and responses to these circumstances is not possible, and I argue it is not crucial; the more important aspect is the development of better understanding and support for justice and particularly for efforts to stop racism. The students in some ways more appropriately and meaningfully empathised with present day rather than past Aboriginal people, as they were able to incorporate aspects of modern culture and Australian society into their imaginative narrative writing. There were no blockages in the students being able to empathise with people of a diverse culture, either.

Probably the largest obstacle to students being able to engage in appropriately or ‘accurately’ empathising was the vastly different social opportunities that they personally receive that are not extended to Aboriginal people. Like the majority of the students, I am white and non-Indigenous, and have not experienced and do not experience the same intergenerational disadvantages and racism Aboriginal people have and do. As a white person I automatically receive social privileges that are often denied to non-whites—I do not need to work twice as hard to maintain a job or to preserve my reputation as a non-white in Australia and other nations where a large proportion of the population is white and English is the primary language (Kivel, 2002). I am not judged unfavourably like Aboriginal people are, as detailed by Bond (in Southwell, Heaton & Fox, 2013) in her account of being stereotyped when in public (elaborated on in Section 2.1). After gleaning the opinions of Aboriginal elders and educators I could only introduce the students to some past and present cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people, and then only from an external
perspective. There was value to this though—I believe my teaching of some aspects of Aboriginal cultures and injustices showed the students that I care, modelling to the students the empathy they could also take in responding to Aboriginal people. As Section 9.1.7 further reflects, non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous Australian teachers both need to contribute to implementing the cross-curriculum priority of moving students toward better appreciating Indigenous histories and cultures—and also, I argue, contemporary injustices.

The cognitive empathy the students developed throughout the program of learning was largely played out in their recognition of the possible perspectives and feelings of Aboriginal people. Gradually, throughout the program, they developed what Rogers et al. (2007) refer to as tendency to consider the thoughts and feelings of Aboriginal people. This comprised an external awareness of their engagement in culture and responses to social experiences, and contributes insights into the effective facilitation of the cross-curriculum priority. As they learned about disadvantages faced by Aboriginal people in the twenty first century, they began to better understand the angst to this oppression from some Aboriginal people—which reflected their responsibility and leadership rather than aggression and unforgiveness. Through not only writing creative narratives but also critical expositions, students recognised the pain experienced by Aboriginal people in response to racism—and better appreciated the way they are amiable and approachable despite facing these oppressions.

Imagining and taking the perspective of Aboriginal people’s experiences were other forms of cognitive empathy the students developed, in which they showed a tendency to adopt the psychological perspectives of Aboriginal people. They were able to
demonstrate sophisticated expressions of empathy that Rogers et al. (2007) contend comprises imagining the responses of Aboriginal people—despite not knowing them. This was predominantly evident in their narrative writing. From the first lesson to the last, students attempted to recognise the views of Aboriginal people, and incorporated these perspectives into their imaginative writing. To a lesser extent, in their expository and reflective writing they also imagined how Aboriginal people might feel when experiencing the forms of racism learned about in class. By presuming an Aboriginal perspective, many students recognised the different forms of disadvantage and racism, such as stereotypical media reporting, and their impact on Aboriginal people. They also identified the strength of character shown by Aboriginal people in response to these disadvantages and discrimination. Some learning moments were particularly significant in assisting students to consider the perspective and imagine the social experiences of Aboriginal people. Learning about the contemporary disadvantage Aboriginal people face in terms of education, employment, housing and health learned about in Lesson 8 was central in their new cognitive empathy. There was an emerging recognition among the students for a need in Australia for further action to stem racism and inequality.

Many students developed affective empathy, which added to their ability to appropriately understand, support and in some ways experience the feelings of Aboriginal people. This involved students feeling appropriate emotions for the circumstances of Aboriginal people—particularly as they learned about past and present injustices. Although they knew they were personally not Aboriginal and have not experienced the disadvantages that Aboriginal people have, numerous students wrote their stories really imagining being Aboriginal, and demonstrated strong
emotion in these creative expressions. I observed that these emotions were appropriate too—students often showed joy when learning about enjoyable aspects of Aboriginal cultures, and upset when learning about oppression. Narrative writing revealed a respect and sensitivity towards Aboriginal people from the students, and for their fight for justice and recognition. Their writing showed an empathetic concern—a sympathy and compassion for others in response to their suffering. These responses were heart-felt and appropriate. They did not simply write their narratives and expositions as tasks they had to do, but as exercises they wanted to do, and personally needed to do to articulate the new feelings they were developing for Aboriginal people and against injustice.

More so, students showed an emotional connectivity with Aboriginal people, evident in feelings of personal distress in their empathetic concern. In this chapter I have disagreed with Rogers et al. (2007) who argue that empathetic concern and personal distress are self-centred feelings of discomfort and anxiety in response to another’s suffering. I contend that such responses among students were an expression of prosocial behaviour, involving imagining being the other person, and blurring distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and experiencing emotions that might in some ways match the emotions of Aboriginal people. In turn numerous students felt, understood and supported some of the feelings and actions of Aboriginal people that they learned about. Identifying the similarities they share with Aboriginal people and relating to them in some ways assisted numerous students to start feeling this connectivity, some to feel deep emotion for Aboriginal people, and others to want to take action to stop racism. Such responses also helped them develop acceptance, and
sympathy and affection for Aboriginal people, which are expressions of allophilia (outlined in Section 8.2).

The resonance that became evident between the students’ empathetic engagement and the new cross-curriculum priority reveals the potential of the curriculum to accommodate anti-racism education initiatives that involve students empathising with Aboriginal people towards perhaps also changing their opinions of them. I conclude that learning to empathise is important, as it quickens the healing of relationships where required, assists students to attempt to better understand and support the views of Aboriginal people, and intercepts anti-social attitudes, including prejudice. From my perspective, empathy provides a positive energy in a classroom, which can commence from appreciating and celebrating Aboriginal cultures and accomplishments, to commiserating with injustice and oppression, and supporting social justice. Empathy trumps sympathy as it necessitates a level of relating or connecting at least in part to the person empathised with, and I found that it resulted in the development of new, favourable perspectives toward Aboriginal people. Further studies would assist in identifying if developing new ways of knowing—in relation to tending to empathise as well as avoiding making presumptions—may contribute to generating longer lasting perspectives among students. It is in the best interest of everyone in the school community and wider community, including the Indigenous community, for Australian students to respond to people who are ethnically and culturally different with empathy, as well as with other pro-social feelings.
Chapter 8  New feelings
I hoped that the program of learning explored in this study might provide opportunities for middle school students to challenge their perspectives. The preceding chapters reported that the students empathised with Aboriginal people (Chapter 7), they challenged, and indeed changed, some of their perspectives (Chapter 6). The other aim of the program was provide an opportunity for students to alter their feelings. This chapter explores whether they altered various feelings toward Aboriginal people as they changed their perspectives—and if so, how and to what extent the new feelings were developed.

From the outset of the program, I perceived that learning outcomes associated with merely a reduction of intolerance, or the increase of tolerance, would not be adequate. Rather, I wanted students to have an opportunity to develop positive or favourable perspectives about, and feelings toward, Aboriginal people—a group of people in Australian society who continue to experience racism (reviewed in Section 2.1). Prior to undertaking this study, I had observed negative perspectives and feelings toward Aboriginal people being spoken by people who I know and also by strangers, as well as by television and radio personalities. Then, at the outset of this study, I observed that all of the students indicated in their Survey 1 responses that they perceived Aboriginal people to hold negative traits. The only student who did not agree that Aboriginal people hold negative traits made unkind remarks about them in the classroom a few days after completing Surveys 1 and 2 in Lesson 1 (elaborated on in Section 4.1). The purpose of this study and its associated program of learning, was not to identify prejudices students might hold, but to explore how students may take control of a learning experience in which they might alter their perspectives and feelings toward Aboriginal people. As explored in Chapter 4,
experiencing disorientation was crucial to having the students proceed to engage in a
new discourse (Chapter 5)—a discourse that presented positive representations of
Aboriginal people. Throughout this discourse they began to challenge not only their
perspectives about Aboriginal people, but also their feelings. These feelings toward
another group of people can are understood and explored using the concept of
allophilia.

8.1 Allophilia

The development of inclusive classrooms, where all students achieve their potential,
is the goal of many teachers. Many of these teachers have focused on achieving
learning objectives associated with multiculturalism (Pittinsky, 2009). According to
Pittinsky (2009), teachers and researchers place an emphasis on negative attitudes
and actions toward people who are different—including racism, sexism and other
forms of prejudice and discrimination, but are not concerned with possible responses
or outcomes antonymous to these attitudes and actions. Pittinsky (2009) elaborates
that anti-racism teaching resources for the most part are about teaching against, or
reducing, racism rather than developing positive responses toward other groups of
people. Where alternative responses to racism and other forms of prejudice are
suggested and explored, he explains ‘lukewarm’ (2009, p. 213) responses are often
aimed for and sometimes achieved—such as appreciation, acceptance, tolerance and
respect.

Despite being limited to such terms, Pittinsky (2009) suggests that the lack of
vocabulary does not mean positive attitudes do not exist. Pittinsky (2009) argues, and
I agree, that by extending anti-racism vocabulary to include positive responses to
other groups of people that are antonymous to prejudice may shift the direction of teachers’ pedagogical practice, and alter the learning outcomes students might reach. Pittinsky (2009) argues that the concept of allophilia contributes to filling this gap, providing positive language and direction in anti-prejudice (including anti-racism) educational initiatives. Allophilia is derived from the ancient Greek allos and philia or phily, which translate ‘liking’ or ‘love’ (philia or phily) and the ‘other’ (allos) (Pittinsky, 2009)—the ‘other’ comprising foreigners in another country or a group of youth in the neighbourhood (Pittinsky, Rosenthal & Montoya, 2010)—Aboriginal people in the case of this study.

The development of allophilia comprises more than achieving a reduction of prejudice, or even an absence of prejudice; it is something real in its own right (Pittinsky, 2009). Prejudice and allophilia need to be considered independently; measuring how much prejudice a person may or may not have does not tell us with much certainty or accuracy how much allophilia he or she may feel. In other words, prejudice and allophilia can be held and demonstrated simultaneously; reducing prejudice and increasing allophilia are two different tasks. Pittinsky (2009) provides the analogy of increased salary and decreased debt—increased salary only leads to decreased debt when the initiative is taken to pay down the debt. He elaborates that the outcome of increased allophilia is different to that attained through decreased prejudice. His research (in Pittinsky, Rosenthal & Montoya, 2010) found that developing a person’s desire to help others, to affiliate with them, and to stand against prejudice stems from an increase in allophilia, not a reduction in prejudice.

The different expressions of allophilia presented by Pittinsky (2009) including in the context of classroom learning among students provides a valuable vantage point from
which to explore the positive feelings toward Aboriginal people that the students in this study developed. This chapter explores five forms or expressions of allophilia towards a group of people who are different from one’s own, as outlined by Pittinsky (2009), in the context of classroom learning—comfort, enthusiasm, kinship, engagement and affection. I explore how students started to feel comfortable and enthusiastic learning about and engaging with an Aboriginal person—what Pittinsky (2009, p. 5) describes as the ‘wow factor’ in learning about another group of people. I explore the development of ‘kinship’ with Aboriginal people, recognising that kinship usually refers to a connection and sense of belonging with family members. I apply it as involving forms of empathy with Aboriginal people in light of the cultures and experiences (predominantly explored in Chapter 7), and their engagement with Stef, an Aboriginal elder, in the final lesson. Additionally I explore the affection for Aboriginal people some students started to develop.

The chapter then concludes by suggesting how teachers might further develop allophilia and other feelings in their students, and the way some forms of allophilia are evident, or partially evident, in the transformative learning of adults.

8.2 The students’ new feelings toward Aboriginal people

Throughout the program of learning the students developed and expressed a variety of feelings toward what they were learning about—towards Aboriginal people and towards social injustice and racism. In this somewhat large section I explore the myriad of positive feelings the students started to show for Aboriginal people by drawing upon the five expressions of allophilia presented and described by Pittinsky (2009) stated above in Section 8.1:
1. Comfort. Feeling comfort toward another group of people in relation to not feeling aversion or discomfort, but willingness and freedom to engage and interact with them.

2. Enthusiasm. Learners being impressed and inspired by the cultures and achievements of another group of people—and by their responses to social injustices in the case of this study—and feeling enthusiasm toward the group in light of this impression and inspiration.

3. Kinship. Identifying similar interests and aspects of cultures and experiences, and (in some ways) relating and empathising with the other group and feeling a level of kinship towards them.

4. Engagement. Actually engaging with people of the other group, and more so feeling forms of engagement and thoughtfulness towards them.

5. Affection. Perhaps truest to the concept of allophilia of ‘liking’ or ‘love’ towards another group—although it remains unclear what ‘love’ may and may not comprise in relation to responding to a person of another group.

Similar to preceding chapters, this section draws upon components of TLT and other anti-racism educational experiences to explore these new feelings the students started to have towards Aboriginal people.

8.2.1 Comfort

The concept of students feeling comfort does not readily accommodate learning experiences that disorientate and transform students’ perspectives. Whereas Pittinsky (2009) suggests that feeling comfortable with a different group of people is a
desirable anti-prejudice learning outcome, educators and theorists suggest its timing is of consideration when the larger objective is to see students alter their perspectives. Disorientation of students’ perspectives precedes shifts in students’ perspectives (elaborated on in Chapters 4 and 6), and experiencing disorientation necessitates feeling discomfort. In the context of engaging employees in a transformative learning experience aimed at altering their perspectives toward best organisational practice, Johansson and Knight-McKenna (2010) explain learners experienced a lack of ease—which Nadler and Tushman (1995) explain disorientates their perspectives. Johansson and Knight-McKenna explain that such unsettling experiences are vital for engaging students in a critical discourse, towards them maybe changing or transforming their perspectives.

Later in a learning experience, after experiencing disorientation, students can become more comfortable with the subject they are learning about, but perhaps not with the alternative perspectives they were considering. In an educational context, Pittinsky (2009) uses the example of teaching students that the words algebra and candy derive from Arabic words and concepts, to move students a step closer to feeling more comfortable about other aspects of Arabic cultures. Some practitioners report that feeling comfortable in the company of another ethnic group during social interactions is a desirable transformative learning outcome (Kokkos & Tsimbouki, 2011). From their research on transformative learning, Wong et al. (2011, p. 496) found that learners can experience ‘comfort’ and assurance through ‘surprising and powerful experiences’ as they discover new things about groups of people of diverse ethnicities. In anti-racism education, students can start to feel more comfortable towards and with people of other ethnic groups. The concept of feeling comfort
towards another group of people involves feeling at ease with them—either when in direct contact with them, or when learning about them. In this study it was more so the latter. While direct interaction between people of different groups can best generate comfort between groups, the position taken in this study is that it is necessary to first introduce concepts of the cultures and social experiences of Aboriginal people in order to prepare students to meet and interact with them in positive ways (reflected on further in Section 9.1).

Similar to these examples from Pittinsky (2009), Kokkos and Tsimbouki (2011) and Wong et al. (2011), the students in this study started considering positive, attractive components of Aboriginal cultures. For example, on the way to the local park in Unit 1, students were challenged to think of names of towns or suburbs that are Aboriginal words—such as Willunga and Noarlunga. Also at the park they engaged in games that they themselves enjoy and that they learned are traditional Aboriginal games. They then enjoyed a party meal which involved them sharing food with each other, which they learned resemble some aspects of a meal in an Aboriginal community. These learning moments, as well as back in the classroom as they learned about the war time efforts of Aboriginal people and their contributions to contemporary society, students continued to feel what Pittinsky describes as comfort towards them. Implicitly in their lesson reflections all but a few students reported that they felt comfortable learning about Aboriginal people and their cultures and experiences; the large majority selecting agree or strongly agree in response to the statement ‘I felt comfortable during this lesson’.

As this was an English class, scaffolding language is common place. Before the lessons began, I explained to students that comfort involves not feeling tense,
threatened or ill at ease. I also explained that the lessons would challenge them and maybe change some of their thoughts and feelings, they would not be assessed in response to whether they kept or changed their viewpoints. The highest level of comfort that the students in both classes indicated they felt was in their reflections on viewing the documentary about Aboriginal cultures (Lesson 2), reviewing the National Apology (Lesson 7), and interacting with Stef (Lesson 16). I reflected that the comfort they experienced in Lesson 16 as well as the significance they attributed to meeting Stef in this lesson showed their readiness to meet her. Preceding lessons that challenged their racial prejudices and increased responses of allophilia (explored progressively throughout this chapter) had prepared the students for this learning experience. Although some students at times were agitated—particularly when recognising social injustice in Australian society as well as their own personal preconceptions (elaborated on in Section 4.1)—they were more comfortable learning about Aboriginal people, and at ease.

It was only very early on in the program, as students completed Surveys 1 and 2 at the beginning of Lesson 1, that I observed that many did not at first feel at ease in learning about the diverse cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people. They had felt awkward or unsettled when they became aware of their preconceptions about Aboriginal people, and again as they commenced learning about the aspects of Aboriginal cultures that are in some ways similar but in other ways different to their own (elaborated on in Sections 4.2.2). But Lessons 3 and 4 changed this. Playing the games was exciting and exhilarating for them, and interrupted some of the awkwardness, discomfort and disinterest they may have first felt.
However, some unease returned in Lesson 5, in which they learned about historical events of genocide and the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families, which contrasted with the fun and joy they learned Aboriginal people experienced in engaging with their community. However, learning about the cultures in Unit 1 prepared them to feel comfortable learning about genocide and the forcible removal of children from their families in Unit 2. Feeling at ease helped most of them to learn new, challenging truths about Australia’s oppressive history, which can cause discomfort and continue to disorientate students’ perspectives (explored in Chapter 4). However, they felt forms of comfort towards Aboriginal people in this second unit and then on into Unit 3—sympathising and empathising with them—although at moments feeling ill at ease in response to the social injustices. Fiona reflected on feeling upset about the injustice of Aboriginal children being forcibly removed from their families, while also feeling sympathy for the children and families:

Watching the mother’s cry and plead as their children were taken away was really upsetting. While watching that scene it made me realise and feel grateful to have a mother and father who are always there for me and who care about me … If I were taken away from my parents I wouldn’t have been as tough and resilient as Molly, Daisy and Gracie. (Fiona, Class A, 21 May 2009).

Feeling comfortable when discomfort might otherwise be felt was similarly beneficial in Lesson 16 when meeting Stef, in response to which Cindy reflected:

Stef’s visit helped me immensely to change my thoughts toward these people [sic]. (Cindy, Class B, 28 May 2010)
Meeting Stef in the final lesson was not a tense or uncomfortable experience for the students, that it may well have been had her visit been early on in the program. The students had prior opportunity to recognise and reconsider their views of and their feelings toward Aboriginal people. However, Stef herself was also largely responsible for the comfort the students showed towards her. She was friendly and considerate in her interactions with them. The comfort students felt made it possible for them to observe her personality, and to reconsider their perspectives about Aboriginal people in general.

The students also exhibited comfort in the way they showed acceptance of Aboriginal people. Students increased their acceptance of the cultural practices of Aboriginal people—a group that they had at first perceived as being very different to themselves. From learning about the cultural practices of Pitjantjatjara communities in central SA in Lesson 1 and north Queensland communities in Lesson 2, they started to realise that there are many similarities between Aboriginal people and themselves (elaborated on in Section 8.2.3). Developing this acceptance was gradual for Verma and many of her peers:

During the lessons I slowly started to warm up to them, feeling a change of sympathy and a special acceptance and affection. (Verma, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Specifically during Lesson 5, while learning about some events of genocide—after having learned about Aboriginal cultures in the preceding four lessons of Unit 1, numerous students indicated in their lesson reflections that they felt acceptance of, and appreciation for, Aboriginal people. Many students reflected that it was while learning about the stories of members of the Stolen Generations in Lessons 6 and 7
that they felt the highest level of acceptance for them. They indicated they felt acceptance and appreciation the least in the four lessons in Unit 1—although the levels in Unit 1 were still far from low. Simultaneously, many of the students felt a greater enthusiasm for learning about Aboriginal people.

8.2.2 Enthusiasm

Feeling enthusiasm for another group of people is what Pittinsky (2009) conceptualises as the ‘wow’ factor when responding to learning about other groups of people. It comprises being impressed by the other group, particularly by their arts and inspiring group members. However, researchers have not said much about the role of enthusiasm—of any form—in transformative learning. Fourcade, Krichewsky and Sumputh (2010) only elaborate generally on the benefits of creating and maintaining an atmosphere of enthusiasm in the learning environment. Magos (2010) details the enthusiasm that was evident among learners as they discovered new things about other ethnic groups while engaging in a critical discourse and exchanging stories with the other group. However, neither Magos or Fourcade, Krichewsky and Sumputh—nor other practitioners or theorists whose work I reviewed prior to facilitating the program of learning explored in this study—have explicitly explored how learners might develop feelings of enthusiasm towards other groups of people. But, as Pittinsky suggests in relation to responses of enthusiasm towards other groups of people, I found that many of my students felt this enthusiasm. They became increasingly amazed by aspects of Aboriginal cultures and Aboriginal people’s responses to social injustices, and felt passion and zeal for learning about social injustices.
At numerous moments during the program, the students were excited about their learning, which I observed assisted in making the learning enjoyable as well as productive in changing their perspectives. Students were often eager to engage in the lessons in Unit 1—many of the girls indicating in their lesson reflections that they were most interested in learning about the closeness and collaboration of Aboriginal people and communities, as well as the intricate basket weaving skills. Many of the boys, on the other hand, were impressed by Aboriginal technologies and techniques for hunting animals—such as the nets Aboriginal boys helped make to catch large animals (elaborated on in Section 4.2.1). This eagerness to learn about the cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people extended into their creative narrative writing, such as in Reg’s creative articulations (also presented in Section 4.2.1):

We would have so much fun playing hide and seek, the bone game and many others. We ran down the steep sand hills, we were taught by mothers how to make tracks in the sand, and we told each other stories while sitting under a wiltja. (Reg, Class A, Narrative: The Wind, 14 May 2009)

Their writing—not only their narrative writing but also their expository writing—had an energetic or charged element of zest to it. Their enthusiasm towards Aboriginal people really started in Lesson 4, during which they were able to play games that they enjoyed and which they learned are Aboriginal games played by children in communities. As elaborated on in Section 6.2.1, Donna, who did not like much about school, reflected:

I loved the games! (Donna, Class B, Lesson 4 Reflection, 11 May 2010)
The students grew increasingly interested in Aboriginal people as they learned more about aspects of their cultures, as well as some of the social injustices. Past inequalities particularly interested the students. In response to being interested and even captivated in the content of this unit, Cindy and others of her classmates directed the character in her narrative to mourn after losing her family, which shows her new understanding of the strong relationships in Indigenous Australian families and communities:

"When the time came to close our eyes I would usually cry myself to sleep, but then remember the good times when my family and I would go and look for bush tucker and just play on the steep sand hills. To this day I desperately want to go back there. (Cindy, Class B, Narrative: *Childhood Lost*, 20 May 2010)"

Such interest whetted many of the students’ appetites to learn more and develop a deeper understanding of racism, its impact on Aboriginal people and the way they have been able to show strength of character in responding to these experiences. They were surprised that the disadvantages they learned about indeed happened, and that other forms of disadvantage continue to be experienced by them, supporting their reflection that racism and disadvantage should stop (elaborated on in Section 5.1). The content of the program was relevant to them and the exercise of producing narratives—although challenging—was enjoyable and meaningful. They understood and supported the notion that Aboriginal Australians need their biographies to be heard and responded to—joy in response to the cultures and contributions to Australian society, and, soberness in response to learning about racism (elaborated on in Sections 7.3).
Many of the students had felt apathy about the cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people at the start of the program, but progressively felt enthusiasm for learning about them. Numerous learning moments saw students enthusiastically engaged with the exercises I facilitated, including when viewing the experiences of members of the Stolen Generations in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*:

I enjoyed *Rabbit Proof Fence* it was very interesting but it hurt to see the kids get taken away from their parents. I felt a lot of compassion for the families that were split up. (Louise, Class A, 21 August 2009)

I also observed numerous students demonstrate keenness for learning about Aboriginal people and the various issues that some of the Aboriginal population have faced and continue to face. This keenness was present in their willingness to know more about Aboriginal injustices. Len was keen to learn about how the Australian Government apologised in 2008 for its past racist policies, especially relating to the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families:

I felt it was great that the Prime Minister apologised to the Aboriginal people. (Len, Class B, Lesson 7 Reflection, 17 May 2010)

As I started to explore in Section 5.3, some of the students’ enthusiasm towards Aboriginal people was evident in how they disliked some lessons, and were less enthusiastic about these in comparison to preceding lessons. Sometimes they enjoyed a lesson and wanted to learn more about a particular topic or event, and were disappointed if the next lesson contained content or followed an approach that was less preferred. The students particularly showed eagerness to learn more about issues of social injustice, and Cindy for instance, after Lesson 7, communicated to me and also privately reflected on her frustration as she perceived the National Apology
speech to not be as engaging as viewing *Rabbit Proof Fence* in the previous lesson. The chronological sequencing of the lessons assisted the students to engage with enthusiasm throughout the program, and they captured this enthusiasm in the narratives they wrote in the same sequencing and energised pace.

I noticed that the students’ keenness in learning about Aboriginal people and their circumstances led them to develop a heightened passion for social justice. At times this passion was displayed as moral indignation towards past and present injustices experienced by Aboriginal people, which productively disoriented and altered some of the students’ perspectives (as elaborated on in Section 4.2.3). Moral indignation not only served as a disorientating part of the learning process leading towards students altering their perspectives and feelings, but was an outcome associated with the achievement of new thoughts and feelings in its own right.

Students also demonstrated enthusiasm for the contributions of Aboriginal people to Australian society. Charles and his peers were amazed by the sacrifices made by many Aboriginal people in World Wars I and II:

> I appreciate that they are still among and are now citizens as they fought politically for their freedom as citizens of their own country now known as Australia. (Charles, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Charles developed a fuller understanding of the meaning and importance of Aboriginal cultural practices, and how these practices and also their past and present achievements in Australian society make them remarkable. The students’ appreciation of their oppression involved them considering their experiences and achievements with thoughtfulness.
The students were often eager to learn more about contemporary achievements of Aboriginal people and their varied contributions to Australian society—achievements and contributions they had not heard about before. They were somewhat eager to learn about the acting and modelling talent and war-time efforts of Aboriginal people, as well as their awards for contributions to charity work. Pittinsky (2009) explains that enthusiasm about other ethnic groups is readily evident in students learning about inspiring members of the other group and also their arts. While the students’ enthusiasm for learning about past and present Aboriginal cultures was generally strongest in the first four lessons, for some students it was strongest in the last lesson as they met Stef, a Ngarrindjeri elder, and heard her stories about her culture—including in relation to needle craft and the environmental challenges facing her community in the Coorong region of SA (explored in more detail in Section 8.2.4). Numerous students also developed a feeling of kinship towards Aboriginal people.

8.2.3 Kinship

Not only did the students develop feelings of comfort and enthusiasm throughout the program of learning, but also kinship. Students experienced feelings of affiliation, connection and empathy as they increasingly understood Aboriginal people. Pittinsky (2009) understands kinship as comprising a sense of belonging with people from different groups—developable through learning more about them or, preferably, spending time with them.

In transformative learning experiences among adults in which learners proceed to experience transformation, understanding another group of people of a different ethnicity, culture, religious belief to the learners’ own is often not an easy learning
outcome to achieve. Attempts to attain such outcomes are evident in numerous transformative learning experiences among adult learners—including those facilitated by Mott and Watkins (2006). Mott and Watkins found that through building collaborative partnerships between employees of different ethnicities, employees come to appreciate each other’s worldviews, values and norms. A perspective transformation in the context of Mott and Watkins’ study was associated with action—particularly in relation to changes in workplace behaviour.

The students developed feelings of kinship towards Aboriginal people as they identified similarities they share. They built an affinity with them as they progressively sympathised with them and, as explored throughout Chapter 7, empathised with them. From developing an affinity with the experiences of Aboriginal people they better understood them, and altered their perspectives toward them. There were similarities between the adolescent students in this study and adult learners undertaking transformative learning, for example, students increased their sense of affiliation with Aboriginal people similarly to the way many transformative learning educators explain adults do. Adult learning facilitators Johnson-Bailey, Smith and Guy (2011), observed the development of affiliation—or connection—with ethnic minorities (in their study abroad programs, where learners worked collaboratively with people in Africa). The learners reconsidered their generalisations about Africa in relation to poverty, violence and danger as they interacted and affiliated with African people. They also increasingly experienced other expressions of allophilia, particularly feeling comfort towards the Africans they engaged with.
The students in my two classes were not able to travel to urban or rural Aboriginal communities—the objective of the program was to prepare them for future interactions and relationships with Aboriginal people by meeting Stef in the final lesson. The students’ classroom-based learning experience assisted them to understand Aboriginal cultures and the effects of racism on Aboriginal people. The students’ heightened affiliation involved them dropping some of their unfavourable or negative perspectives and feelings toward Aboriginal people so they could start to respond to them more positively. Comparing several aspects of their personal cultures or lifestyles to those of Aboriginal people, as well as some of the experiences they perceived as resonating with those of Aboriginal people, helped students develop a sense of kinship. They consistently indicated in their lesson reflections that they felt affiliation and connection towards Aboriginal people, which can be considered as feelings of kinship. Students especially indicated that they felt affiliation and connection when learning about the effects of racism in Lesson 9, although, according to the students, these feelings were not as strongly experienced as other emotions, including sympathy, compassion, liking and thoughtfulness.

The key to students’ feeling of heightened kinship towards Aboriginal people was their capacity to identify similarities, which they had not done previously. The students noticed many components of Aboriginal cultures and experiences that they perceived to be similar to their own. Perceiving the similarities diminished the differences that they had assumed existed between their own cultures and experiences and those of Aboriginal people. Before Lesson 5, the party at the park, many students compared large Aboriginal feasts to their own attendance at special events, such as parties, at which they gathered to enjoy the company of friends and
relatives. This comparison assisted them appreciate this component of Aboriginal cultures—it was evident that the students greatly enjoyed Lesson 5, and at end of the program many indicated that it helped them to agree and strongly agree that Aboriginal people are fun-loving, friendly and generous, after they had initially disagreed and strongly disagreed.

In different ways throughout the lessons, the students were able to identify similarities they share with Aboriginal people. Verma was one of many students across both classes who perceived the general similarities she has with Aboriginal people:

    But, as I found out in the lessons following, that they are very much the same as we are. I realised how special every person is in their own very special way. (Verma, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Numerous students, particularly the girls, started to realise that being different is fine, and appreciated the beauty of cultural and aesthetic diversity. Some of the students acknowledged that although there are noticeable differences between themselves and Aboriginal people, these are few compared to the many similarities they share. They proceeded to celebrate the differences as well as the similarities. Emma also increasingly better understood Aboriginal people, and developed an affinity with them in the form of ‘sympathy’, ‘understanding’ and ‘compassion’:

    I felt a great amount of sympathy and understanding. When I learnt about the mass murder of these wonderful people I felt compassion and consideration toward them. (Emma, Class B, 28 May 2010)
The students progressively developed an affinity or like-mindedness with Aboriginal people while learning about them. For many, this sense of affinity developed from an initial aversion. Students formed positive perspectives of the perceived qualities of Aboriginal people and their communities, and their creative narrative writing identified aspects they share in common. While most of the girls (and some boys) often developed an affinity with Aboriginal people by pondering their emotional responses to race-related injustices they experienced, most of the boys, but also some of the girls, connected with Aboriginal people as they learned about their collaboration and cleverness in hunting:

We set the nets between four giant gum trees and started to chase the emus to those trees, and finally emus stopped defending themselves by biting the net. Colin was bigger than Clifford and I, that’s why he held two emus one was on his shoulder another he dragged behind him. Clifford held the spears and I was holding the net. (Jim, Class B, Narrative: *The Hunt*, 20 May 2010)

From learning about aspects of Aboriginal cultures and actions, most of the students—boys and girls—increasingly saw ‘them’ as not dissimilar to ‘us’. Racial barriers were blurred, and even dismantled, as they increased their knowledge about Aboriginal people.

A large component of feeling affinity or kinship with Aboriginal people was the feelings of sympathy these students responded with. I noticed in their reflections that sympathy was a common and strong response to the circumstances of Aboriginal people. For Cindy, among others, learning about the Stolen Generations, along with other topical issues the comfort she felt towards them, elaborated on in Section 8.2.1.
Although some of the students’ demonstrations of sympathy involved elements of pity or sorrow for the pain and distress faced by Aboriginal people, most of them also showed respect and esteem. Many students indicated feelings of sympathy and compassion for Aboriginal people, particularly while learning about events of genocide (Lesson 5) and the forcible removal of children from their families (Lesson 6). As a whole, the students indicated they felt sympathy and compassion the most when learning about past rather than current oppressions, which is perhaps due to the shocking nature of the past injustices. Learning about genocide in Lesson 5 was perhaps most the most challenging, evoking the greatest amount of sympathy from students. As a whole, students indicated that they felt less sympathetic in later lessons as they learned about the contemporary disadvantages faced by Aboriginal people. At this point of the learning, however, students were considering the old perspectives they had held, and continuing to form and strengthen new perspectives (elaborated on in Chapter 6).

From engaging in the program and adding a paragraph or two to their narratives and expositions in response to lessons, the students developed and demonstrated cognitive and affective empathy (explored in Chapter 7). The students’ empathetic engagement with Aboriginal people was the largest indication of their new understanding of the effect of social injustices on Aboriginal people, and of their kinship towards some aspects of their cultures. Empathy was the driving catalyst in the alteration of some of the students’ perspectives, including Gail’s, as evident in her reflection on the learning experience:

The lessons that switched my perspectives greatly was the writing of my narrative. It helped me step into someone else’s shoes and then channel [sic] all
my new positive emotions through my writing. I was able to express my creativity, while feeling the pain, hurt and love at the same time. (Gail, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Empathy was evident in the manner they deeply thought about and felt emotional responses as they learned about the circumstances of Aboriginal people—trying as it were to live in the others’ shoes or perceive their perspectives and feelings. This resulted in many of them feeling a kinship towards them. Most indicated that they felt affiliation and connection towards Aboriginal people across all of the lessons, but felt it the least (but still did feel it) when learning about low standards in Aboriginal health, housing, employment and education in Lesson 8 (which was a difficult learning experience for some of them as elaborated in Section 5.3). The students indicated that they felt affiliation and connection the most when listening to Tanya’s stories about her experiences with racism in Lesson 9, as they were able to connect these stories with those of the Aboriginal people they learned about before and after this lesson. The students showed considerable capacity to understand Aboriginal people better by empathising with them in light of their hurt and pain.

From feeling kinship towards another person or group of people, students better understood them in celebrative and commiserative ways that has at its centre respect and value. I found that increasing feelings of kinship led to increasing knowledge about Aboriginal people. As they affiliated with some aspects of Aboriginal cultures and experiences, students perceived and understood Aboriginal people more positively—seeing them as holding myriad favourable traits as discussed in Section 6.4. What helped them further, and perhaps the most, was the final lesson in which they met and interacted with an Aboriginal elder, Stef.
8.2.4 Engagement

Engagement can comprise a feeling or attitude towards another person or group and, separately but also often synonymously, an action or activity with them. In relation to the latter, the students in this study had very little direct engagement with Aboriginal people. I had expressed to them that as a white, non-Aboriginal Australian, I am unable to speak on behalf of Aboriginal people, but nonetheless I could introduce the students to some aspects of their cultures and historical and contemporary experiences. From consulting with Aboriginal elders before and while preparing the program of learning, I selected the items the students would interact with to engage them in a new discourse about Aboriginal people.

The teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is a cross-curriculum priority for all Australian schools, and hence requires collaboration between, and contributions from, all Australian teachers—Indigenous and non-Indigenous (reflected on further in Section 9.2.7). In alignment with West (1999), I argue that Aboriginal cultures and social experiences need to be properly contextualised to students in a body of learning. This can contribute to stereotypes about Aboriginal people not being further perpetuated.

In the case of this study, students were provided with the opportunity to see favourable aspects of Aboriginal people, and to start thinking critically about injustices in Australian society, before they proceeded to meet an Aboriginal person, Stef. Meeting Stef was the pinnacle of the program, as it brought all the preceding lessons to a climax. The course provided contextualisation to the students to now engage openly, respectfully and perhaps appreciatively with Stef. The first 15 lessons were beneficial for the students to have them rethink what they knew or thought they
knew about Aboriginal people—although it is difficult to know to what extent the preceding lessons were necessary. Stef told me that she was silently stared at by the majority of students in the school yard as she walked with me to the Year 8 classroom, and that this was a common occurrence when she visits schools. She also told me that the Year 8 students in this study ‘were ready for me’, and I likewise observed the students to be attentive, engaged and respectful in listening to her and asking her questions. They enjoyed meeting Stef and listening to her stories, and appreciated what she had to share with them. The benefit is at least partly evident in the initial preconceptions about Aboriginal people they indicated they held, and the positive ways they started to perceive Aboriginal people at the close of the program (their new perspectives are outlined in Chapter 6).

The students really enjoyed engaging with Stef. Some students, including Louise, identified that it was beneficial to meet her and to hear her perspective about Aboriginal cultures on issues about the environment in her home town in the Coorong, and how she felt about the Apology (initially learned about in Lesson 7):

Actually hearing from an Aboriginal point of view really helped. Stef’s visit was cool and interesting. She explained how she felt about her cultures and what she felt about how people treated them. She showed us posters and books about her Aboriginal cultures [sic] and she expressed a lot about how she felt about the government’s apology speech. (Louise, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Gail indicated that learning ‘the way Aboriginal people acknowledge each other even if they don’t know them’ was most significant to her. No student indicated that they did not appreciate getting to know Stef, and no one felt uncomfortable in the lesson as they listened to her stories and asked her questions. The lesson was significant in
particular for Helen, who, like Stef, is Ngarrindjeri. As elaborated on in Section 4.2.1, Helen had the opportunity to engage with Stef after the lesson. This final lesson of the program led Helen to improve her perspective, coming to see Aboriginal people as loving and approachable. Helen mused how Stef’s visit, especially the poetry and a couple of small gifts that Stef gave to her, assisted her to ‘appreciate’ or ‘like’ Aboriginal people more; a people with whom she identified but had known so little about, and had assumed held unfavourable traits. She really benefitted from engaging with her:

I loved the poems that she read and how she explained them and how she gave me a ring and a bracelet. (Helen, Class A, Lesson 16 Reflection, 21 August 2009)

Helen agreed that Aboriginal people—her people—are approachable and loving after she had initially disagreed. Receiving the ring and the bracelet, in the Aboriginal flag colours of red, black and yellow, from Stef was most significant to her. Helen later indicated that this lesson, along with some of the earlier lessons, were highly significant in helping her to confront her former negative beliefs about them:

Watching the DVD documentary that she [Stef] brought helped me understand a bit more about my Aboriginal background and their way of life. I felt a lot of connection with her and the tribe [sic] during these certain lessons. One of the lessons I also enjoyed was when we started to write about how we feel about racism and Aboriginals [sic]. (Helen, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Future studies could further explore the role of engagement as an anti-racism learning process and outcome, including in relation to the example given by Pittinsky
(2009) in relation to pen pal activities and face-to-face interactions between students of two different cultural groups. However, students felt engagement with Aboriginal people while learning about them at numerous learning moments throughout the program without actually interacting with them. Imagination was imperative in this, and although it is desirable for actual physical, face-to-face engagement to occur, as stated above, the cultures and experiences of Aboriginal people need to be first introduced to students so that ensuing interaction might be better contextualised.

In the classroom and at the local park the students engaged with the cultures of Aboriginal people in Unit 1 as they learned about and imagined various aspects of their lifestyles. At the park, in response to my prompts, they looked around them through the trees and around the creek. Engagement continued as they played the games in Lesson 4, and in Lesson 5 as they learnt about with the past injustices and acts of genocide. In response to learning about genocide and the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families, some students, including Verma, felt thoughtfulness as well as compassion:

I never knew what we Europeans did to them. I am thankful to have learned of the biases and racisms of Europeans and I want to always have compassion and thoughtfulness toward any other cultures and people groups. (Verma, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Again it can be seen in Verma’s reflections how the different forms or expressions of allophilia can merge and occur simultaneously—students often felt engagement towards Aboriginal people as they also felt comfort, enthusiasm, kinship and also affection toward them.
8.2.5 Affection

Affection is perhaps the expression that is most synonymous with the concept of allophilia—the liking or love of another group of people (Pittinsky, 2009). Pittinsky (2009) describes affection in the context of classroom-based education as comprising the promotion of close friendships, which can be demonstrated through pen pal initiatives and especially the facilitation of students associated with different groups meeting with each other. Through the lens of TLT, Agarwal (2011) found that adult Muslim and Hindu students in India developed more positive relationships with one another—relationships that could be likened to this notion of affection contextualised in allophilia.

I find it difficult here to report precisely if the adolescent students in this study developed responses of affection for Aboriginal people—particularly in relation to the concept of love. Love can mean different things to different people. It can mean a respect, concern and empathy for your neighbor as in the Biblical teaching to ‘love your neighbour’. While this concept of brotherly love is acceptable, encapsulated in the Greek word *philos*, I steer away from the concept of love in this study due to the romantic relational meanings it can have, as well as looser interpretations that can be applied—such as I love my dog or even I love coffee. Rather, I explore, briefly, the other concept of allophilia and affection which has to do with a liking or even a strong liking of another group of people—Aboriginal people in the case of this study. In such demonstrations from students, I found a variety of positive or affectionate emotions felt by students toward or for Aboriginal people—including some that were quite strong or deep.
Kris at first indicated that he held numerous preconceptions (elaborated on in Chapter 6), but started to see Aboriginal people in more positive ways. Kris did not quite indicate in his reflections on his learning experience that it was he who developed a ‘major liking’ of Aboriginal people, by ‘many people’ (it is unclear who these many people are—but perhaps he is referring to me or the positive representations of Aboriginal people contained throughout the program). However, in his reflections and his Survey 3 responses clearly indicated that he had improved his feelings and his opinions:

The feelings that have changed my perspective towards Aboriginal people are the major liking [sic] towards Aboriginal people by many people [sic]. The sympathy I’ve felt for them over the past term, openness toward Aboriginal people [sic]. Especially consideration towards Aboriginal people from what they’ve gone through [sic]. The lessons that have improved my opinion of Aboriginal people are Stef’s visit (Aboriginals are funny and kind), media bias (not all news is true) ... and writing narratives (put ourselves in their shoes) ...

The new things I’ve learn are that not everything you hear about aboriginal people [sic] in newspapers, TV, magazines or the radio are true. (Kris, Class B, 28 May 2010)

Kris’ new perspective of Aboriginal people being ‘funny’ and ‘kind’ replaced his former antonymous thoughts and feelings toward them. He indicates here that he progressively felt sympathy, openness, consideration connectivity and affection related to ‘what they've gone through’.
‘Warm’ emotion or affection was also evident in the way many of the students connected their own experiences with those of the other person after initially resisting the learning. Britney reflected how she wrote her story in a manner in which her character responded to adversity in a way she perceived she would have if in the same predicament:

This story made me feel very emotional as I wrote it [emotion] in the story very deeply ... I felt what I wrote was what I would have done if I was her. (Britney, Class A, 21 August 2009)

Rosa also started to connect with Aboriginal people, and felt strong emotions, including what she specifically referred to as affection for Aboriginal people upon learning about past and present injustices:

I felt understanding, affection and sympathy for Aboriginal people and what they went through ... now that I know all that they have been through I feel strong emotions. (Rosa, Class B, 28 May 2010)

Verma indicated that she developed a tolerance for Aboriginal people, which she had not felt previously. Although the objective of the lessons was to facilitate the opportunity for students to challenge and change their perspectives, such steps were big wins, as initially she had been far from tolerant. Later in the program, Verma also formed a ‘special acceptance’ towards Aboriginal people, and seeing that they are not that much different to herself and the people she interacts with.

The feelings of affection and other expressions of allophilia—comfort, enthusiasm, kinship and engagement—that the students developed throughout the program of learning comprised central outcomes in the overall objective of the alteration of
students’ perspectives and feelings. It became increasingly evident to me that the students’ altered perspectives and feelings were very much interconnected.

8.3 Summary and reflections

Racism comprises perspectives in the form of stereotypes and ideologies, feelings in the form of prejudices, and actions in the form of discriminatory behaviour. This study has dealt with the first two, and while Chapter 4 explored how perspectives can be disoriented and Chapter 6 how students can change them, this chapter has explored the range of positive feelings that students can develop in response to Aboriginal people. One of these positive new feelings was empathy, which was explored in more detail in Chapter 7, and in this chapter has been categorised as a form of feeling kinship towards Aboriginal people. Whereas kinship pertains to having a family bond, Pittinsky (2009) applies to being possible in one’s feelings towards another group of people. This study has taken the approach that teaching against racism with outcomes of tolerance, acceptance or respect for other ethnic groups is too neutral. I have explored how positive outcomes, antonymous to the cognitive and affective responses that racism and other prejudices can entail, should be developed.

This chapter has reported how many of the students developed feelings toward Aboriginal people that were new to them, and allophilia has provided a conceptual basis for exploring the variety of new feelings experienced. Interestingly, the allophilia response of affection has been least elaborated on in this chapter, although it shares the closest resemblance to the concept of allophilia which Pittinsky (2009) coins from ancient the Greek words for ‘liking’ or ‘love’ and the ‘other’. As the
concept of ‘love’ is subjective and prone to misinterpretation, I have predominantly explored the concept of the students liking Aboriginal people under the banner of affection, but this is perhaps largely synonymous with the concept of improving one’s opinion towards another person or group, which is parallel to the new perspectives that students developed (explored in Chapter 6). Accordingly, the development of new perspectives comprises an aspect of the development of allophilia. In relation to the development of new feelings, however, the other aspects that Pittinsky (2009) explains comprise allophilia provide a useful lens—comfort, enthusiasm, kinship and engagement towards other groups of people. Further exploration of these forms of allophilia may add to anti-prejudice research, including anti-racism educators’ vocabulary of positive cognitive and affective anti-racism learning outcomes.

Following initially experiencing disorientation, which is necessary for unsettling prior perspectives in order that they may be altered (reflected on in Section 4.3), it is necessary for students to feel comfortable with, and particularly comfort towards, Aboriginal people. Students felt comfort towards them as they identified cultural aspects they share in common with them—enjoying the games and the party meal in Lesson 4 was useful to the students understanding that Aboriginal youth enjoy the same types of activities that they do. Feeling at ease helped most of them to learn new, challenging truths about Australia’s oppressive history, and then continued as they met Stef and engaged with her. The initial lessons prepared the students by helping them to understand some of the cultures of Aboriginal people, as well as their disadvantage, in order that they might engage positively with Stef as she shared with them environmental and cultural issues affecting Aboriginal people.
Like Pittisky (2009c), I found that the students feeling enthusiasm towards Aboriginal people was the ‘wow’ factor in their learning. They were impressed by the variety of accomplishments of Aboriginal people that they learned about. Many of the students in my classes felt this enthusiasm. They became increasingly amazed by aspects of their cultures and their responses to social injustices, and felt a passion and zeal for learning. Aspects of the fine arts were generally responded to with enthusiasm by the girls, while generally the boys were eager about the technologies and techniques of Aboriginal people in hunting and gathering. As in the development of comfort towards Aboriginal people, the games assisted the students to become enthusiastic. Some students who did not like school and struggled academically appreciated playing the games, and reflected they ‘loved’ them. Enthusiasm towards Aboriginal people and social justice was evident in the support of many students for the Apology to members of the Stolen Generations—Aboriginal people taken from their families as children. Alternatively, the enthusiasm of other students was evident in how some did not like this lesson as much as others—they reflected that they were appreciating and benefitting from the chronological flow of preceding lessons that this lesson interrupted, and that it did not add much to their journey of discovering new, exciting things about Aboriginal people. There are significant gaps in transformative learning and also anti-racism education for learners of a variety of ages, and further research would assist in identifying the potential of enthusiasm as a positive anti-racism learning outcome.

What was very important, as elaborated in this Section 8.2.3, was the ‘kinship’ most of the students increasingly felt for Aboriginal people, including in the form of empathy. Kinship is an interesting word in this context, as it usually pertains to a
family bond, but Pittinsky (2009) applies to being possible in one’s feelings towards another group of people—including being able to relate or affiliate with them to some certain extent. In this study, students’ feelings of kinship refer to such abilities to feel a connection to Aboriginal people, to perhaps feel some level of attachment, including in terms of identifying similarities (explored in Section 4.2.2) and to empathise with them (Chapter 7).

I observed that many of the students developed different forms of affinity with the Aboriginal people they learned about, particularly as they identified aspects of their own personal cultures or social experiences that they could compare in some ways to those of Aboriginal people. The students noticed numerous components of Aboriginal cultures and experiences that they perceived to be similar to their own. Perceiving the similarities diminished the differences that they had assumed existed between their own cultures and experiences and those of Aboriginal people. Numerous students, particularly girls, started to realise that being different is fine, and appreciated the beauty of cultural and aesthetic diversity. Some of the students acknowledged that although there are noticeable differences between themselves and Aboriginal people, these are few compared to the many similarities they share. They proceeded to celebrate the differences as well as the similarities. They started to see Aboriginal people as fun-loving, friendly and generous, and more so saw ‘them’ as ‘us’—in other words they not only developed new specific ways of seeing Aboriginal people but their ways of knowing them, and perhaps also other groups of people (elaborated on in Section 6.5.2). From developing an affinity with the experiences of Aboriginal people they better understood them, and altered their perspectives about them.
Last, before reflecting on this study and suggesting further research in Chapter 9, I conclude that what was greatly beneficial to the students in altering their perspectives and feelings was them feeling an engagement with Aboriginal people. Before meeting Stef in the final lesson, the students engaged at a distance from them. It was important to prepare them for meeting Stef, so the students imaginatively engaged in the learning, particularly at the local park as they imagined Aboriginal children engaging in the games and other cultural activities, and then their responses to the genocide experienced by Aboriginal people. Many of the students incorporated this imaginative engagement strongly into their narrative writing, in which they incorporated their new perspectives and feelings toward Aboriginal people, and their new learning, including the environmental and social issues that Stef told them about. The final lesson was of course most beneficial to the students engaging with Aboriginal people, as it involved face-to-face interaction with Stef. While I contend that this program of learning took the right approach by facilitating opportunities for students to alter their perspectives and feelings toward Aboriginal people, and to prepare them to interact with the people they had initially held preconceptions about, further anti-racism and multiculturalism initiatives that provide students more face-to-face interactions with Aboriginal people would extend and strengthen the outcomes achieved in this study. This is one of numerous final reflections and suggestions for further exploration detailed in Chapter 9.
Chapter 9  Final conclusions
In conducting this study, I sought to discover how facilitating anti-racism and Aboriginal studies might engage Australian school students in a discourse that counters stereotypes about Aboriginal Australians prevalent in social and media discourses. Specifically, I explored the question:

*If middle school students’ engagement with an anti-racism learning program will alter their cognitive and affective responses toward Aboriginal Australians?*

As reflected in the students’ responses to Surveys 1 and 2, all of the students initially held at least one or two negative opinions about Aboriginal people. Christensen (2007) states social surrounds can influence children to hold prejudices toward other ethnic groups, and with my students that might well have been the case. All of my students (including Helen who identified as Aboriginal) initially came to class with preconceptions about Aboriginal people, which they indicated they had heard from family, friends, and social and public media, and had believed to be true. Through participation in the learning program, students started to think critically about these stereotypes, and developed greater social awareness and appreciation for Indigenous Australians, and for ethnic and cultural diversity in general. This study explored the students’ engagement in an anti-racism and Aboriginal studies program that became part of my teaching of middle school English.

The study started with students identifying their individual beliefs about Aboriginal people. They were more inclined to disagree than agree that Aboriginal people hold positive traits (reflected on further in Section 9.1.4). As a class, throughout the program we proceeded to challenge these preconceptions, and students changed their opinions about Aboriginal people.
This learning process was different to the regular education of middle school students in that I anticipated (as based on findings reported by Inada (2007), reviewed in Section 2.3.2)—and then experienced—the program of learning being uncomfortable and at times confronting for the students. To understand these experiences in my classroom I turned to the adult learning theory of transformative learning. I found some resonance between the students’ experience and TLT. This theory is appropriate because, as I found and so too others, including Bigelow and Peterson (2006), adolescents are at an opportune stage in their development to be open to considering new perspectives. After having been influenced by family, peers and media, being introduced to Aboriginal studies that overtly examined racism resulted in students changing their perspectives and feelings towards Aboriginal people.

This concluding chapter provides my reflections and suggestions for teachers, as well as for researchers, in further investigating the value of anti-racism education in middle schools.

9.1 Key findings

Throughout the program, all of the students changed at least a few of their opinions of Aboriginal people, as reflected in responses to Survey 1 and then to Surveys 3 and 4. My findings in this study concur with York (2003) and the NSW Government (2013) that discomfort and even backlash from some students, their parents and the teachers’ colleagues can be invariable reactions from pursuing an anti-racism agenda (explored in Section 5.4). The students learned how racism can be expressed, and tracked the historical impact of racism on Aboriginal people, which linked the legacy
from colonisation (reviewed in Section 2.1) to the present day. Following initial consultation with Indigenous elders and educators, as commended by Craven (2013), a program of learning was developed and facilitated, and students’ responses analysed (Chapter 3). The process involved the majority of the students experiencing disorientation (Chapter 4) as they engaged in a new discourse that largely contrasted with the stereotypes about Aboriginal people they had observed and believed (Chapter 5). Many students not only challenged, but changed, their perspectives about Aboriginal people (Chapter 6) while they expressed empathy in their written work (Chapter 7). Not only was empathy developed and demonstrated, so were other positive feelings toward Aboriginal people—expressions of allophilia (Chapter 8).

From this study I offer the following suggestions for further exploration both within schools and education research:

1. opportunities in the new Australian curriculum
2. the need for disorientation in anti-racism education
3. student autonomy in reflecting on a new discourse
4. the possibility of some change in perspectives and feelings
5. the pathway that empathy and imagination provides
6. alterations of students’ ways of knowing and feeling
7. collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

### 9.1.1 Opportunities in the new Australian curriculum

The continuation of racism in Australia as elaborated on by Craven (2013) underlies the recent inclusion of teaching about Indigenous Australians in the National Curriculum Framework, with this cross-curriculum priority accommodating anti-
racism learning experiences and outcomes. The new National Curriculum Framework provides strong opportunities for the teaching of Aboriginal studies in such a way that may achieve anti-racism objectives. However, only 1 per cent of Australian teachers and 2.4 per cent of the entire Australian population is Indigenous (UniSA, 2012). Because the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is not only a curriculum priority but a cross-curriculum priority, that is, a curriculum priority across all subject areas at school, all Australian teachers need to contribute to its implementation. Unfortunately, however, as we have seen in the Independent Christian school in this study, many Australian teachers are not in a good position to fulfil this mandate. Craven (2013) argues that less than one third of a group of 600 teacher education students in Brisbane had met and spoken with an Aboriginal person. These teachers identified that their level of knowledge about Aboriginal culture as ‘little’ to ‘some’, and had formed negative opinions of Aboriginal people, and, like the students in this study, many indicated they had formed these opinions through media reporting. This study specifically sought to redress these deficiencies.

The Australian curriculum provides Aboriginal people with a voice—a voice that has often in the past been denied them (Craven, 2011). However, there remain gaps between schools possibly incorporating these voices and actually doing so and in a meaningful way (West, 1999). This study has explored how a white non-Aboriginal teacher may contribute to previous and current efforts. The National Curriculum Framework prompts myriad opportunities for Australian students from Foundation (or Kindergarten) through to Year 12 to better understand Aboriginal Australians. The range of subject areas, cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities that are
outlined in the new curriculum (ACARA, 2013a) resonate with the approaches that I took. At the time of facilitating the program of learning explored in this study the National Curriculum Framework had not yet been released, but the SA curriculum framework, SACSA, was drawn upon, and considerable similarities are seen between the SACSA framework (DETE, 2001) and the new National Curriculum Framework (ACARA, 2013a). The areas of resonance between the two included students learning about ‘power relationships, inequality and the distribution of wealth in society’ and ‘diverse perspectives on the past, and other places, cultures, societies and social systems’ (DETE, 2001, p. 293).

The resonance between the approach I took in this study and the aspect of the cross-curriculum priority provides an indication of the scope of implementing the new curriculum. Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures across the different subject areas ideally requires teachers to consult with Aboriginal elders—as was the case in this study—towards identifying sensitive yet effective inclusions within their pedagogical practice. In the context of this study, English provided opportunities for students to respond to and produce critical and creative texts with an Aboriginal Australian cultural and racism theme. ACARA explicitly links the cross-curriculum priority to the new English Literacy strand, which includes ‘understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature’ (ACARA website, 2013a) in response to texts ‘drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts’ (ACARA, 2013b). Not only does the strand link with the cross-curriculum priority, but also with numerous general capabilities, most pertinently intercultural understanding and its components of empathy, respect and responsibility. The classroom activity of reflecting on the new discourse and
producing narratives and expositions allowed for these curriculum learning outcomes to be realised.

9.1.2 The need for disorientation in anti-racism education

The need for anti-racism education is synonymous with the reality of racism in society, with race related discourses having potentially influenced students’ views of ethnic minorities. As the emphasis of this study was on having students consider and perhaps reconsider their perceptions of Aboriginal people, at first I provided them opportunity to challenge their understandings, which links with the approach taken by Peterson (2007). Where they were confronted with conflicting information they faced a disorienting dilemma, which in most cases lead to the development of new understandings.

However, and as elaborated on in Section 4.1, not all of the students’ initial preconceptions about Aboriginal people were negative. Indeed, it is possible to hold favourable and unfavourable preconceptions of another person simultaneously (Pittinsky, 2009). However, all of the students held at least some negatives view of Aboriginal Australians, and their learning experience throughout the program disrupted and challenged many of these adverse preconceptions.

I propose that students experiencing disorientation is as equally essential as students engaging in anti-racism and Aboriginal studies in the first instance. Learning of the reality and impact of racism is common in anti-racism educational initiatives—and when this learning is new for students it is disorienting. It presents students with a dilemma regarding how they will engage in a new discourse that conflicts with their prior understandings of their society and the people they are learning about.
Allowing students to be disoriented, challenged and unsettled by new information ran counter to my usual relationships with my students, and I found such moments personally and professionally challenging; I questioned whether I should be facilitating learning experiences that unsettle students. However, insights from TLT theorists, including Mezirow (2000) and Lange (2004), and also teachers of children and adolescents, including Bank (2008) and Inada (2007) (as reviewed in Section 2.3.2), gave me confidence to recognise that disorientation was needed to open students to the self-reflection, critical analysis and empathy that anti-racism pedagogy inevitably requires. While some students closed off and proceeded to experience what Jarvis (2011) in the context of TLT refers to as a meaningless or non-learning event, others embraced this new learning. The students’ perspectives were challenged, and here I believe it was imperative that a safe and supportive classroom had been established and that the teacher was trusted. Most of the students found new ways of looking at Aboriginal people and considering the preconceptions that they held. Disorientation often resulted from engaging with the new and challenging discourse, and this disorientation resulted in them engaging further in critical thought about the social experiences of Aboriginal people.

The first and largest disorientation came in Lesson 1, when the students were surprised when asked to indicate their perceptions of Aboriginal people in Survey 1, and of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal boy in Survey 2. Up until that moment, the students’ preconceptions had not been known to me, and often not by many of the students themselves. As Bonnett (2000), and Delgado and Stefanie (2000) suggest, race-related preconceptions are often held subconsciously. Reviewing their responses to the two boys as they learned about their identities disoriented most of the students,
leading to them questioning why they had assumed that the Aboriginal boy held negative traits and the white non-Aboriginal boy held positive traits. Students continued to experience disorientation throughout the program as they identified similarities they share with Aboriginal people, felt moral indignation towards the injustice they experience, and also, simply, became more aware of Aboriginal cultures and experiences (elaborated on in Section 4.2.3). The divisions they had constructed between ‘us’ and ‘them’ were shaken, which assisted students to engage in critical thinking all the more. In other words, not only were perspectives about Aboriginal people disoriented, but so also were their understandings of ethnic groups who are different to themselves. Students started considering whether they should be judging other people based on their differences—real or perceived.

9.1.3 Student autonomy in reflecting on a new discourse

Providing students liberty to respond as they wished to new learning is essential—particularly when the information can at first disorientate their perspectives. As explored throughout Chapter 7, I found it beneficial to provide students latitude to produce their reflections, creative narratives and critical expositions, which allowed them to articulate their new views of Aboriginal people. Like Mezirow (1997) and also Imel (1999) (elaborated on in Section 2.3.3 in the context of TLT), I found it valuable to provide students space to write their lesson and program reflections silently and independently, as well as their creative narratives and critical expositions in class and for homework (detailed in Section 3.1). They needed leeway to reflect on their preconceptions of Aboriginal people, and how they had made these presumptions.
Students appreciated being explorers, engaging in a journey of considering aspects of Aboriginal cultures and experiences that are new to them. Like Pelo (2007) suggests, leading questions fuelled their engagement in critical thinking about Australian society, and drove their empathetic thinking and feeling towards Aboriginal people. Their critical thinking often emerged in their reflections on their learning, which included being informed of the social privileges enjoyed by non-Aboriginal Australians that are often denied to Aboriginal Australians detailed by Larson et al. (2007) and others in Section 2.1.1. I found that to foster critical thinking it was imperative to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for the students in which they could consider their perspectives and form new thoughts and feelings—similar to the findings by Bigelow 2007b). It was important for students to know that a ‘right’ response was an open and honest response, and that English studies criteria, such as spelling, grammar and writing structure, and not their perspectives and feelings, would be assessed.

I could not, however, completely hide my own views on racism. Nor should anti-racism educators be expected to do so, for after all, the purpose of anti-racism education is about challenging students’ thinking. I recognise that some students may give a response that they perceive the teacher wants to hear, but I found that students often felt free to hold perspectives on issues that were different to my own. Several students reflected on how they came to realise that they—and not I, the School, their parents, or the media—have the determining say in their perspectives and attitudes, and this was an essential aspect of the learning outcomes achieved.

For anti-racism education to be effective, I conclude that the teacher needs to allow conflicting views to be held, and discomfort, disorientation, indignation and even
anger to be experienced. By definition, such responses will not be comfortable. Teachers must value contributions from students and provide encouragement, and not pre-empt the answers they want to hear and see. I understood that the students’ engagement in the alternative discourse about Aboriginal people was not easy for them, and it was important to extend to them personally my understanding, respect and patience as they engaged in learning that was very new to them.

9.1.4 The possibility of some change in perspectives and feelings

Indications of some alteration of students’ perspectives were evident. At the completion of the program the students held more favourable and open-minded attitudes to Aboriginal people than they had at the beginning of the study. Throughout the program the students explored a range of Aboriginal people’s experiences and achievements that extended their prior learning and students formed new-found respect for their history of resilience and forbearance. Javis (2011), in the context of TLT, explains adult learners alter their perspectives later on in a learning experience, while I found that there was a variety of paces at which students in this study altered theirs. Most changed their perspectives early on, some gradually throughout the program, and some only quite late, including in the final unit. There were positive medium-term effects too; six months after the completion of the program the students’ mostly maintained their new awareness (elaborated on throughout Chapter 6). Follow-up programs may strengthen and extend such outcomes, but this study indicates that not only may students change their individual perspectives, but their ways of knowing Aboriginal people (reflected on further in Section 9.6).
The students’ rich reflections complement and extend these indicative insights of the alterations of perspectives and feelings. Some students openly reflected that they had initially felt prejudice towards Aboriginal people, with Emma for instance feeling ‘fear’ and ‘distance’. Pippa and Fiona, reflected that they initially felt apathy—‘indifferent’, ‘disinterest’ and ‘bored’—in response to learning about them. For most, these feelings dissipated as they started to engage in the new learning. This study has labelled numerous new feelings toward Aboriginal people that students developed as ‘positive’. This reverberates with Pittinsky’s (2005) concept of allophilia, which comprises positive attitudes or a liking or love towards another group of people who is different to one’s own group. Echoing Pittinsky (2009), I found the students increasingly felt comfort, enthusiasm, kinship, engagement and affection towards Aboriginal people. Additional studies could explore other anti-racism educational initiatives, as well as other forms and expressions of allophilia that can be developed. Positive perceptions in the form of cognitive and affective responses to another group of people are responses that can be perceived as genuine anti-racism—or antonym-racism—learning outcomes. As Pittinsky (2009) suggests, such positive responses to another group supersede outcomes associated with tolerance, as opposite to prejudice.

9.1.5 The pathway that empathy and imagination provides

As evident in their narrative writing, students started to recognise, imagine, understand and in some ways share the perspectives, feelings and actions of Aboriginal people. They found themselves in another world—the other’s world—particularly as they produced narratives from the perspective of an Aboriginal character. The students showed empathy—in distinctly cognitive and affective ways
(Cox et al., 2012)—with contemporary, as well as past, Aboriginal people. This was despite Jenkins’ (2007) conclusions that empathising with people from by-gone eras is not instinctive and often not possible. However, Jenkins’ point regarding limitations in accurately understanding the cognitive and emotional state of a person is valid. I agree that complete accuracy is not possible, but I also contend it is not crucial—just feeling for recipients of racism and disadvantage is enough to encourage students to challenge their perspectives, at least in the anti-racism and Aboriginal studies context of this study.

From experiencing early disorientation, and engaging in critical thinking about stereotypes attributed to Aboriginal people and injustices experienced by them, students proceeded to empathetically respond to Aboriginal people. These responses resonate with inclusions in the National Curriculum Framework associated with developing students’ intercultural understandings in the form of empathy (ACARA, 2011; reflected on further in Sections 9.1.1 and 9.1.5). These students incorporated the new learning into the production of their narratives, often writing from the imagined perspective of an Aboriginal character.

This empathetic and imaginative writing journey provided the students with a creative opportunity to attribute traits to the main character, and to construct and narrate the characters’ engagement in cultural practices, as well as their responses to past and present experiences. All of the students demonstrated empathy in one way or another in their written expressions, and through empathic narrative writing they often showed their new perspectives about, and feelings toward, Aboriginal people. These new perspectives for the main part complemented their Survey 3 and 4 responses.
Empathy with Aboriginal people often commenced through students making links between their own personal experiences with circumstances of Aboriginal people learned about. They then often incorporated these links in the development of their narratives, which were written from the imagined perspective of an Aboriginal character. In doing so, they recognised that they cannot fully relate to the cultures of Aboriginal people and their experiences of social injustice, as this is beyond their own lived experiences. The tentative links they made, however, helped them to empathise at least a little with Aboriginal people, and to imagine their experience and what impact it would have. Their writing showed an empathic concern—a sympathy and compassion for others in response to their suffering—which can be described as ‘pro-social functioning’ (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004), and which shaped the majority of the students’ perspectives. These responses were heart-felt and appropriate. Most students did not simply write their narratives and expositions as tasks they had to do, but as exercises they wanted to do, and even as personally needed to do, to articulate their developing new feelings for Aboriginal people and against injustice. This research demonstrates that narrative writing is a tool for students to capture their new learning, and for identifying their emerging perspectives and feelings.

9.1.6 Developing new ways of knowing and feeling

Students in this study not only developed new perspectives and new feelings, but also new ways of knowing and feeling about Aboriginal people. Here lies an important distinction. As Mezzena (2011, p. 192) states, ways of knowing ‘cannot be reduced to rationality’, and Yorks and Kasl (2002) explain learning must fully engage a learner’s whole self in context to their social surroundings. Section 6.5.2
explored how the students learned to challenge not only their specific perspectives about Aboriginal people, but they also learned to watch their presumptions about attributes belonging to Aboriginal people in general, and also to other people who are seen belonging to a different group. I hoped students might build respectful, meaningful relationships with Aboriginal people, which they might take with them beyond this middle school based initiative, and further studies could contribute to insights into longitudinal outcomes.

Students not only developed specific new perceptions about Aboriginal people, but also new ways of knowing in relation to not making presumptions about them (elaborated on in Section 6.5.2), and new ways of considering and empathising with the others’ circumstances (Section 7.4.2). Several students reported that they were beginning to see the impact of judging Aboriginal people and other groups in general. Some students recognised the trajectory from stereotypical thinking to prejudicial feelings to discriminatory behaviour (NASP, 2013). Recognising these nuances and pathways, and understanding that every individual needs to be personally known before presumptions are made about them, put them in good stead to being more inclusive of Aboriginal people.

As this was a limited study, it is evident that having students engage in several learning experiences over several years would strengthen and extend their new ways of knowing and feeling.

9.1.7 Collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

As has been indicated earlier, teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is a curriculum priority, and as only 1 per cent of Australian
teachers and 2.4 per cent of the entire Australian population is Indigenous (UniSA, 2012), all teachers need to be involved. However, non-Indigenous Australian teachers cannot assume, and cannot be expected to assume, the voice of Indigenous Australians (Craven, 2013). While the new curriculum provides opportunity for Indigenous voices to be heard by the next generation of Australians, as this study has identified there remain gaps between these prompts in the National Curriculum Framework and schools and teachers actually incorporating these voices in teaching students. There are various possible explanations for Australian schools and teachers not doing so—a lack of knowledge on how, not having the skills, not seeing the need, and perhaps not wanting to (as was evident at the site of this study) (see also West, 1999).

As teaching about Indigenous Australians, is now a cross-curriculum priority, and accordingly must flow throughout all subject areas from Kindergarten to Year 12, escalated professional development for teachers is imperative. Also, and as this study has shown, it is essential for teachers to first consult with Aboriginal educators and elders while designing and before implementing learning experiences for students. However, and as reviewed in Section 2.1, Indigenous families and communities report how they often do not feel welcome or respected by schools, and accordingly do not trust or engage with them (Southwell, Heaton & Fox, 2013). Schools need to initiate the fostering of better relationships by involving Indigenous people to facilitate professional development opportunities among school staff, to enable the national cross-curriculum priority to become each school’s and teacher’s cross-curriculum priority.
Australian Indigenous elders and educators can be invited to facilitate or contribute to the professional development of Australian school staff—from teachers to administrators to leadership (see also NSW Government, 2013). Specific to Aboriginal studies in this study, as a non-Aboriginal Australian I found that my prior learning and experiences, as well as my conversations with Aboriginal elders and educators, assisted me to sensitively introduce this kind of material to the students.

Professional development can include school staff auditing their current incorporation of Indigenous histories and cultures, and reviewing before implementing culturally sensitive yet effective pedagogy—like that explored in the literature review in Chapter 2 and reported on throughout this thesis.

From my perspective in the context of the resistance that I experienced from some parents and School staff (discussed in Section 5.4), I propose that it is imperative for teachers to find and maintain a supportive network of colleagues, which preferably includes school leadership (principals, deputy principals, middle school coordinators etc.). I found it necessary to develop and own a vision and resolve for facilitating such a program of learning, that went beyond my students’ prior incomplete, tokenistic, patronising or omitted learning about Aboriginal people.

Also from my experience in a predominantly white and conservative school, I contend that it is useful for students to engage in some prior learning about Indigenous people (as advised by Indigenous educators and elders) before they interact with Indigenous people and communities. The first 15 lessons of the program introduced students to some past and present cultures, experiences (particularly injustices) and achievements of Aboriginal people before Stef (the Aboriginal elder and cultural educator) shared with the students some aspects of her culture and
experiences. Unlike other students in the School who stared when the Aboriginal elder visited, the students in this study felt comfortable and were attentive and respectful. Staff and students engaging with Aboriginal people is integral to authentically actioning this cross-curriculum priority. It must be remembered that many Aboriginal elders and educators will still today draw curious and hostile attitudes when they enter schools.

Throughout this study I became acutely aware of a need for the school community to work together—particularly the need for anti-racism and multicultural educators to be supported by other teachers and school leadership. Spalding et al. (2010) state schools need to back the efforts of teachers who are facilitating opportunities for students to learn about social justice. However, it was surprising that some staff, including leadership, at a school that espouses Christian values would be hostile to anti-racism and Aboriginal studies.

School leaders are gate keepers, determining their school’s curriculum and hence students’ learning. Van Dijk (1993) explains that institutional leaders can permit or prevent the amelioration of future race relations—anti-racism education lending itself to a preventative strategy (Greenberg et al., 2003) for seeing students developing in their social interactions and responsibilities. I found that the middle and senior school coordinators’ uncertainty regarding how to respond to some parents’ complaints resulted in them being uncertain how to deal with the situation. For schools to adhere to the National Curriculum Framework, school leaders need to support the teachers who are implementing it in their teaching, towards achieving meaningful outcomes. It is yet to be seen what guidelines the newly elected Coalition government is to give to Australian schools, which also points to the need for ongoing research.
9.2 Final comment

By drawing upon resonance with TLT, this study identified components of a meaningful anti-racism learning experience for adolescents. The need for such learning is evident in the underlying anti-racism imperative of the new cross-curriculum priority of learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. In the case of this study, students navigated their disorientation and developed new perspectives of Aboriginal people. Achieving this outcome required accurate and positive representations of Aboriginal people be incorporated into the program. Consultations with Aboriginal elders and educators assured the program’s authenticity.

From experiencing disorientation, students generally engaged in deep levels of critical thinking about what they had formerly believed about Aboriginal people. These perspectives were largely unfavourable, shaped by conversations with family and friends, and formed from viewing television and radio programs. Facilitating disorientation is the most confronting aspect of anti-racism educational initiatives for teachers as well as for students, as it potentially stands opposite to the care and nurture that a teacher might have already established with their class. At the same time, disorientation is the most essential aspect, and is required for bringing students to a position where they can confidently determine the beliefs they might hold. In this, care is required in leading students through learning that first disorientates them, towards them, on their own accord, challenging and perhaps changing their perceptions.
Adolescents have the cognitive capacity to critically analyse their attitudes and be challenged by their new learning. The students in this study when aware of the diversity in Aboriginal Australians, accordingly recognised that they could not judge Aboriginal people as a group. They realised that what they were learning about some Aboriginal people and communities, and aspects of their past and present cultures and social experiences, conflicted with their former generalised preconceptions. The majority of students developed new perspectives about and feelings toward them, including expressions of allophilia. Central to the development of new perspectives and feelings was empathy, and many students imagined what the Aboriginal people might have thought and felt.

This study also identified that some students did not alter their perspective or feelings—or at least did not indicate that they did. For any genuine alteration of perspectives and feelings to occur, students need to have time and opportunity to explore the issues and to reflect on their learning experience. Further learning opportunities would reinforce and extend students’ understanding and new perspectives of not only Aboriginal Australians, but of racism more generally.
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Appendix 1  Examples of lesson plans

Lesson 6  Viewing the film Rabbit Proof Fence (RPF)

Date  7 August 2009  Lesson/s  1, 2 and 3 (135 minutes)

Resources  Television and DVD player, The DVD of RPF, worksheets, pens, popcorn
No. students  19

Overview
The students view RPF which depicts the events before, during and after the forceful removal of three girls, Molly, Daisy and Gracie from their mother and community. Throughout the film they complete a worksheet (attached) that asks them how they feel about the various events captured in the film.

Aim
To challenge and develop students’ understandings about past injustices experienced by Aboriginal people.

Timeframe
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Present to the students an overview what was learned about in Unit One (Past Cultures) and Lesson Five (the arrival of the British in 1788, colonisation and genocide of Aboriginal people). Students answer three questions regarding what has interested them so far in the lessons. Introduce the policy concept of the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hand out the worksheet (attached) and ask the students to progressively and succinctly identify 7 scenes that particularly grabbed their attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>View the first half of the film. Stop the film a few times to remind the students to fill in the worksheet after viewing the scenes that particularly grabbed their attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A drink/toilet break. Hand out the popcorn. Remind the students about the worksheets. Quickly check that they are filling these in. Inform them that at the end of this triple lesson they can add a paragraph or two to their progressive narratives to capture the content or concepts of the film. Ask the students what from the first half of the film they might include in their narratives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>View the second half of the film. Only stop the film once to remind the students to complete filling in 7 scenes and indicate their emotional responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A drink/toilet break. Before the lesson find a student who would like to share the first few paragraphs of their narrative with the students, and now have her or him read it to the class. Ask the class what scenes from the film they would like to capture and adapt in their narratives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Students write another one or more paragraphs to their ongoing narrative from what they perceive to be the perspective of an Aboriginal person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Links to Literature
Content (language and concepts simplified for the students)
- The White Australia Policy and the legalisation of the forcible removal Aboriginal children from their families (Perkins & Langton, 2009).
- Assimilation related policies aimed to deculturalise Aboriginal people by enforcing them to embrace the values and behaviours of European Australians (Bandler & Fox, 1983).
- Racism is a pervasive, offensive form of prejudice, that can centre ideological assumptions of the biological inferiority of other ethnicities (Derman-Sparks & Phillips; 2000).
- Aboriginal people were classified animals (Webb & Ensticte, 1998)

Teaching / Learning
- To learn about the adverse effects of social injustice (Bigelow, 2007a).

Learning Environment
- By modelling and facilitating caring and democratic learning environments and approaches to learning students better understand appropriate social interactions (Bigelow, 2007a).
Lesson 6 Activity     Viewing the film Rabbit Proof Fence (RPF)

Today we have three English lessons, throughout which we will be viewing and responding to the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*. These lessons will conclude with you having 15 minutes to respond to the film by adding one or more paragraphs to your progressive narratives.

Viewing the film may make you feel a range of responses. You are asked to identify six scenes and indicate what emotions you felt (if any), and how much you felt them (please see the example below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Kindness/thoughtfulness</th>
<th>Affiliation/connection</th>
<th>Acceptance/appreciation</th>
<th>Liking/affection</th>
<th>Sympathy/compassion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. 1</td>
<td>The girls’ mother yells to them to run from the police.</td>
<td>Nil          Some        Lots</td>
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</table>
Lesson 8  
Wheel of Disadvantage

Date  
11 August 2009  

Lesson  
6 (45 minutes)

Resources  
Statistics from the ABS, whiteboard/blackboard, Wheel of Disadvantage worksheets (attached), pens

No. students  
19

Overview  
Some statistics related to the social inequalities in health, housing, education, employment, legal representation and life expectancy are introduced to the students. The students fill out the worksheet to capture the causalities between these disadvantages (low educational achievement leads to low employment rates leads to low housing leads to low health outcomes etc.), and the causality of racism to these (please see the links to literature below).

Aim  
To have the students better understand the gap in life outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. To challenge and alter students’ thoughts and feelings about ongoing injustices experienced by Aboriginal people in Australia.

Timeframe  
Minutes  
Activity  

10  
Present an overview re. what was learned in Unit Two (Past Injustices). Hand out the worksheet and read through. Students think about and write a short response to the 3 questions (2 minutes each).

20  
Basic dictation. Students copy down statistics on the discrepancies between Indigenous (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) and Non-Indigenous Australians in education, employment, housing, health, legal representation and life expectancy (see these statistics in the attached worksheet).

10  
Ask the students the questions to answer in their books: ‘what role does racism play in these social injustices?’ and ‘how might ongoing racism result in these injustices continuing?’.

2  
Set homework – continue adding to the narrative – the final is due 17 August 2009.

3  
Students complete the lesson reflection and submit to me.

Links to Literature  

Content (language and concepts simplified for the students)

- Racism causes psychological distress (Paradies, Harris & Anderson, 2008) Racism can perpetuate social disadvantage among those who are already disadvantaged, fulfilling the social and economic interests of those who already advantaged (Young-Bruehl, 1998).
- Systemic inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia are maintained and further perpetuated by what Larson, Gillies, Howard and Coffin (2007) refer to as interpersonal racism and by what Martin-McDonald & McCarthy (2008) refers to as white privilege.
- Racism increases depression and poor health (Paradies and Cunningham (2009).

Teaching / Learning

- To delve ‘beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom and mere opinions’ (Shor, 1980, p. 290).

The Learning Environment

- The emotional and psychological wellbeing of students must be ensured before real thoughts and feelings are shared. By modelling and facilitating caring and democratic learning environments and approaches to learning students better understand appropriate social interactions (Bigelow, 2007a).
Lesson 8 Worksheet  Wheel of Disadvantage

In our lesson today we are learning about the present day disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal people. In particular, we are identifying the gaps in life outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

I will provide you with the statistics and I would like you to copy them into the respective sections of the wheel (e.g. place the employment statistics in the employment section). Please see the e.g. for education below. This is a straightforward activity because I want you to think about these social realities faced by Aboriginal people.

Before we go through the other five lots of statistics for the other areas of disadvantage, please answer (in your exercise books):

1. What feelings might Aboriginal people have is response not receiving the same educational outcomes as other Australians?

2. What reasons might there be for Aboriginal people not receiving the same educational outcomes as other Australians?

3. How may a lack of educational attainment affect employment outcomes?
Appendix 2 Lesson and program reflections

Lesson reflections (an example of a student’s reflection)

REFLECTIONS

Section 1: Please circle the extent to which you felt the following responses to the Aboriginal people/communities we learnt about TODAY (0 = not at all, 6 = very high):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptance / Appreciation</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindness / Thoughtfulness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection / Liking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation / Connection</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy / Compassion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoration / Strong affection/liking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 2: What did you learn in this lesson that particularly ‘grabbed your attention’

1. Aboriginal people weren’t accepted as people until 1967.

2. Aboriginal people were still accepted into the army.

3.

Section 3 Answer the following statements in light of TODAY’S lesson:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements:</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I clearly understood what I was required to do.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I felt uncomfortable engaging in the task.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. This lesson helped me to further improve my perspective of Aboriginal people.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson reflections (another example of a student’s reflection)

17

REFLECTION

Section 1: Please circle the extent to which you felt the following responses to the Aboriginal person that you imagined you were in your narrative (0 = not at all, 6 = very high):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance / Appreciation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness / Thoughtfulness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection / Liking</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation / Connection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy / Compassion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoration / Strong affection/liking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The racism and disadvantage

3. Relationship with parents

Section 3: Answer the following statements in response to your work last week in which you wrote your narrative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I clearly understood what I was required to do.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I felt uncomfortable engaging in the task.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. This assessment task helped me to further improve my</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perspective of Aboriginal people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I enjoyed this assessment task.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program reflections (an example of a student’s [typed] reflection)

Student 24

Reflection on the lessons

I learned a lot of new things about Aboriginal people. Unfortunately we often only hear the negative stories about Aboriginal people and communities, and not many positive stories, which in turn transforms society’s outlook on different people groups.

I liked many of the lessons. It was good to read the speech and to know what it meant, but it wasn’t really a lesson that we could build on while writing the narrative. It didn’t really fit in with the topic.

Stef’s visit helped me immensely to change my thoughts toward these people. When Stef came to our school and talked to us about Aboriginal culture, I was really amazed by what Aboriginals have gone through in their lifetimes. The things such as the stolen generation, massacres and disadvantages experienced, have made me change my perspective of Aboriginal Australians.
Program reflections (another example of a student’s [typed] reflection)

Student 8

Reflection on the lessons

When we started this segment in English this term I had quite a few negative ideas and emotions toward Indigenous Australians. I was starting to see that the things that I had previously heard were now looking a lot less truthful as they had before. Studying the wheel of oppression gave me a better insight into the chain reaction that starts at being shunned and possibly ends up in crime. I realised that when prejudice takes root in people’s minds and then flows out through the media it then spreads around like a disease and infects others, who then come to the same biased conclusions.

The lessons that switched my perspectives greatly was the writing of my narrative. It helped me step into someone else’s shoes and then channel all my new positive emotions through my writing. I was able to express my creativity, while feeling the pain, hurt and love at the same time.
Appendix 3  Creative and critical writing

Narrative writing (drafting a paragraph, example)

25

Narrative Paragraph #4

I have seen my best friends have their babies stolen from them...

Without word or warning, one minute they were there, the next, gone. Taken without any real reason, just that "our people couldn't look after our own children!" The hypocrisy of it!

They were mistreating our children, not us. They thought that by stealing our children, they could 'break' us. The darker complication. How much pain did they realise they were causing us? They were no better than the abductors and kidnappers of today's age.

My best friend, Mandy, was 'one of those who were raised of their beautiful children.' She was a very good mother, strong, but kind and loving. To her twin daughters, Jade and Amanda, who were the apple of her eye. She did everything she could to give them the best lives possible.

Then one day, a tall, strong-looking white man came to her home and ordered her to give her two children immediately as he had papers authorising their removal by the government. She looked for her doors and windows and bid the girls in her bedroom closed. The white man then kicked the door down with rage and stormed into her bedroom where Mandy sat crying on her bed. He flung open the doors of the closet, ignoring Mandy's protests, and hoisted both Jade and Amanda under his arms and rudely out of the house, throwing both girls into the back of his car, then drove off with a loud screech of the engine. Mandy never saw her two girls again.
I am Aboriginal

My name is Leon, I’m a 240 year Aboriginal man and this is my story.

I’m running down a sandy hill, the wind blowing past me, with the sound of my friends stacking it behind me in my ears. We were racing to our lessons for the day. I was the first person to arrive at our lesson first as usual. My mother teaches me and some other boys in my tribe how to make and identify tracks. After that my father and some other men in my tribe teach us to hunt. The men would roll a puddy melon along the sand and we would have to spear it. I came close to hitting it but the other men hit it spot on. Later on that day my mother led some of the children and me in a traditional Aboriginal dance.

Since we did so well this day, the next day we were treated to a special hunt. My father, some other men, boys and I went out with only one thing on our minds, ‘Dinner’. There might also be a special treat if we find one. We went on the hunt it didn’t take long for us to find something to eat, a nice big kangaroo. It heard us so it went on a runner we ran after it, but we lost it so we decided to follow the tracks it left. After half an hour we found it again being careful not to frighten the kangaroo my father went for the kill and he got it square in the stomach with his spear. Me and some other boys had to carry the kangaroo it was hard but I hoped it would be worth it. One of the men had found the tracks of the delicacy we followed it for what seemed like two hours until we finally found the delicacy it was the humble echidna we killed it and drained its guts trough a hollow stick. Happy with what we had caught we returned home with our catch. The women were happy and they began taking of the spines on the echidna and burning the fur on the kangaroo. One thing we all knew is that we wouldn’t be hungry tonight.

That’s all the good things in my life but there are also some bad things. Later on in my life I witnessed the coming of the white people and the many killings or genocides that happened because of the white people. I was lucky to be living one day as I was chased away from my tribe by the white men while the men of our tribe were having a men only corroboree. I was chased away from the land that I knew and brought into a land of big tall structures that I now know as buildings they took me into one and asking me questions in a foreign language. After they find out that I can’t understand them they kicked me out of the tall building and I ran for my dear life. When I got back to my tribe they all hugged me and asked me if I was hurt and where I had been. I told them I was okay and where I was.

Another bad thing that happened during my life that is a bit more recent is when my great grandchildren were taken from my daughter and taken to a mission camp set up by the white people as an attempt to wipe all out. We were so sad. We sat there feeling helpless as we saw the motor vehicle drive away with my grandchildren. Years later we had other children taken the same thing the people running in taking the children with the women screaming after the motor vehicle. We never saw them again. After a while our tribe only had three children. Of which we kept away safe from the white people. Over all about ten children were taken from their families. This they now call the stolen generation.

The last thing that is great in my life is the apology from Kevin Rudd as the Prime Minister. He forgave for the wrong doing of the Europeans and hoped to have a better future with us all.

I’m now 240 years old and I know the end is coming for me so I’m trying to live the best I can before I die.
My name is Balun and I am an Aboriginal man. I am 247 years old as I was born in 1763. Over the years, I have been through many things, both good and bad. I am going to tell you a story of some of them, starting from when I was 5.

It was a chilly morning and my dad Baranduda was going to teach my three big brothers and I how to hunt for our own food. This was an important lesson for in case we were to get lost and didn’t know how to hunt for food. I was very excited, like a child in a candy shop, as I was tired of staying home doing nothing except eating, sleeping and playing games. It also meant that Dad was trusting me more.

We headed off into the bush. It was hot and dusty and all I can think of was the water hole that we would be fishing in. It took us half an hour going through the squeaky hot sand, and all I could think about was imagine myself swimming in crystal cold water. It felt as though we were walking around the earth.

Once we arrived at our destination, I couldn’t feel my legs. However, that was just the beginning. After we had a little swim to get cool, we commenced. Then back to the important lesson, but, my three big brothers didn’t look energetic, they looked like they had nothing to do, but for me it was like an adventure of solving a mistily. Dad said that today he was teaching us how to hold your breath under water and catch fish at the same time, my uncle Benjan who already know how to do it caught 10 large fish, my Dad 13, my three brothers Pundaroo, Yumboo, Nouget
Exposition writing (drafting a paragraph, example)

EXPOSITION PARAGRAPH #2

Write a structured paragraph by using PEER (make a point, explain, expand, and reference) (reference a news article of an Aboriginal story) that continues from yesterday’s and outlines positive contributions and/or attributes of one or more Aboriginal community. You may use the following paragraph starter, but I encourage you to try your own.

Perhaps the main issue of not believing every news story that you hear is the issue of balance. Every community, just like every person, regardless of ethnicity, has both good and not so good attributes. Unfortunately, we often hear of the negative stories about Indigenous communities, but there are many positive stories, including... 

The Adelaide Advertiser, an article, was published with the headline Aboriginal director Warwick Thornton wins Cannes prize, on May 26, 2009. Warwick Thornton directed a first time film Samson and Delilah, which depicts young love in a troubled community, in Alice Springs. It takes a strong and unflinching look at the problems facing Australia’s remote Aboriginal communities. Samson and Delilah, played by first time actors Rowan McNamaa and Manisa Gibson, was awarded the Cannes prize at the 62nd Cannes film festival by a French actress, Isabelle Adjani. It was said about this film, "The best love film we've seen for many a year." It is marked with long silences and in it is played in Central Australia's language, Warlpiri.

Just as every person has good and bad attributes, every people group and culture also has good and bad actions. It is often ours, to think, speak and to spread negative stories and jokes, whether it be publicly or in newspapers and television or quietly at home. Often through, there are good stories about Aboriginal accomplishments, for example an article...
Exposition writing (a final submission example)

English Exposition – My People

(553 words)

I am Aboriginal, and my people have gone through a lot since the European settlers arrived on our land in 1877. Although almost everything has improved for us since then, there are still things going on today.

Usually, we don’t get the same rights as “Australians”. 33.4% of my people don’t even make it to year 9, which obviously doesn’t give us a very good start in life. Because of this, often we can’t get employed, or because of the fact we like to live out in the open plains, keeping peace with the land. Areas like this are quite scarce in jobs, and only about half of us are employed! This leads to a whole number of problems for us; no housing, health problems and legal issues. It even lowers our life expectancy; on average, my people die 17 years younger than other Australia. We call this the wheel of oppression, because one thing leads to another, sort of like a chain reaction going around in a ‘wheel’ cycle.

Not everyone is racist to my people and I, but some are... even random people that I don’t even know judge me by my skin colour. I was walking down the street one day when some teenager yelled out some very inappropriate and cruel stuff at me. I felt angry and hurt, but I knew better than to react.

There are also rumours going around, myths. Some of these things are that we as Aboriginals get special treatment, that we drink excessive amounts of alcohol and that we don’t want to work. All of these things are not true, and very unfair. My people are offended by this; why should people do things like this? Right from the start the white people treated us differently, as if we were below them; we never done anything to them without reason so I do believe that this racism should stop.

Despite all this racism, not everything is bad. The 65.6% of us that do get through school try to do well in life. Some of us have even won NADOC awards; for 2009, Larissa Behrendt won Person of the year, Wayne Quilliam as Artist of the year, Gemma Benn as Youth of the year, Andrew McLeod as Sportsperson of the year, Loojiia O’Donoghue won the Lifetime Achievement award and Danny Schasio won Apprentice of the Year.

When you look through a magazine, the first thing you would expect to see is a blonde girl with blue eyes. I personally don’t think that this is right, automatically assuming it would be a ‘European Australian’ model. Lately, more and more Aboriginal woman are becoming models and appearing in magazines.

Some of my people are even in movies. One of the most popular Aboriginal movies is Rabbit Proof Fence, which is about three girls who were taken from their from their home, but escape and found their way back home by following the rabbit proof fence for 1,500 miles. The girls that acted out this movie are, Everlyn Sampi as Molly, Tasma Sarisbury as Daisy and Laura Monaghan as Gracie. Another actor in this movie is David Gulpilil who acts the tracker, and is ironically the main character in another movie called The Tracker.

We are proud of these people, and we are proud of our culture. (:
Appendix 4  The surveys

Survey 1 (Surveys 3 and 4 are identical).

**SURVEY # 1**

Please carefully consider and respond to each of the following statements, by;
- placing a tick in the box to indicate your level of agreement, and;
- giving a brief explanation for your response (optional).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal people are:</th>
<th>Sev. agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Sev. disagree</th>
<th>Please explain</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Ugly</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Trouble-makers</td>
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<td>6 Beautiful</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Good parents</td>
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<td>13 Uninteresting</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Complainers</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>17 Talented</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Humble</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Naughty</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Beautiful spirits</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Brilliant</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>22 Angry</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 Good leaders</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Self-oriented</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25 Unfriendly</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Survey 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Explain</th>
</tr>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Resilient (tough)</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>Irresponsible</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>Weak</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Foolish</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Ungodly</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>Godly</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>Impatient</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>Arrogant</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>Patient</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>Approachable</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>Dirty</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>Bad parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Forgiving</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
**Survey 2**

**Survey #2**

**Part A**

Please look at the following picture. Carefully consider and respond to each of the following statements by placing a tick in the box which best indicates your level of agreement.

![Picture](image_url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This boy (standing) looks like he is...</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1  Cared for</td>
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<tr>
<td>2  Pleasant</td>
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<td>3  Clever</td>
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<td>4  Fun</td>
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<td>5  Interesting</td>
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<td>6  Harmful</td>
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<td>7  Peaceful</td>
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<tr>
<td>8  Interesting</td>
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<td>9  Violent</td>
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<td>10 Talented</td>
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<td>11 Naughty</td>
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<td>12 Brilliant</td>
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<td>13 Aggressive</td>
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<td>14 Self-oriented</td>
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<td>15 Unfriendly</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Trustworthy</td>
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<td>17 Gentle</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Unintelligent</td>
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<td>19 Well-presented</td>
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<td>20 Dis-liking</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 Foolish</td>
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<td>22 Ugly</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 Patient</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Approachable</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 Dirty</td>
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</table>
PART B

Please look at the following picture. Carefully consider and respond to each of the following statements by placing a tick in the box which best indicates your level of agreement.

This boy looks like he is...  |  |  |  |  |  
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
1. Cared for |  |  |  |  |  
2. Pleasant |  |  |  |  |  
3. Clever |  |  |  |  |  
4. Fun |  |  |  |  |  
5. Interesting |  |  |  |  |  
6. Helpful |  |  |  |  |  
7. Peaceful |  |  |  |  |  
8. Interesting |  |  |  |  |  
9. Violent |  |  |  |  |  
10. Talented |  |  |  |  |  
11. Naughty |  |  |  |  |  
12. Brilliant |  |  |  |  |  
13. Angry |  |  |  |  |  
14. Self-centered |  |  |  |  |  
15. Unfriendly |  |  |  |  |  
16. Trustworthy |  |  |  |  |  
17. Gentle |  |  |  |  |  
18. Unintelligent |  |  |  |  |  
19. Well-presented |  |  |  |  |  
20. Fondevrage |  |  |  |  |  
21. Foolish |  |  |  |  |  
22. Ungodly |  |  |  |  |  
23. Pious |  |  |  |  |  
24. Approachable |  |  |  |  |  
25. Baby |  |  |  |  |  

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Appendix 5 Information sheet and consent form

Information sheet / letter

30 March 2010
Dear Guardian
RE CONSENT FOR YOUR CHILD's INVOLVEMENT IN MY RESEARCH STUDIES

My name is Adam Heaton and I am teaching your student English this year. I am also a university student, working towards gaining a Doctorate of Philosophy (in Education).

The research, and the thesis that I am required to write in response, centers the theme Indigenous Perspective Development. This topic examines the extent that students might empathise with Indigenous Australians; from commemorating with past and present injustices through to celebrating past and present achievements. This focus follows and compliments the range of curriculum goals that CCS advocates.

This research spans two years; commenced last year and concluding this year. The students that participated last year deeply appreciated and benefited from developing their perspectives, evident in their written responses. For 2010 we commence this focus in our English lessons at the start of Term 2. I am sure this years students will likewise benefit as they learn about Indigenous issues and in response write a story, exposition and a piece of poetry.

There are a number of procedures that you should be aware of prior to giving consent for your student to be involved in this study. These procedures concern confidentiality and privacy associated with the collection and storage of student work and video footage. If you do give consent and at a later date you or your child desire to withdraw his/her participation, s/he will be given alternative English tasks to engage in.

When your student undertakes assignment work, worksheets, lesson reflections and other work associated with this research, s/he is given a number by which I use to identify his/her work. Also to protect their identity and to keep their responses confidential, a pseudonym (fake name) is given to each student when I write my thesis and related reports in response to how the class and individual students responded.

Due to my primary role and function as a teacher, I will be deploying the use of a video camera to record the entire class. The video camera will not focus on any individual, but will rather span the activity of everyone. I will be in the video, teaching from the front of the classroom, and the video footage will mainly be viewed – only by myself – at a later date to recollect exactly what was taught and the general response from the class. Video footage will not be used in any way other than for research purposes, and shall not be observed by anyone other than myself and possibly at times my university supervisor.

The last issue is about the storage of video footage and paperwork. All video tapes and written responses; whether assignment work or in-class worksheets and lesson reflections, will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet during and after these lessons. As per university guidelines, these materials will remain locked for five years prior to the completion of the research, only to be used for the purposes of my thesis and related reports and only to be accessed by myself and my supervisor upon request.

I would like to reiterate that at any stage during Term 2, you and/or your student may opt for him/her to withdraw from their involvement in this research. If this is the case, alternate English tasks will be given to your child in a different location.

If you have any further enquiries concerning your child’s participation in this research, you may contact me on 0457 802 222, or alternatively my supervisor, Dr Greg Shaw, on 0427 397 263, or the Head of Ethics, Margaret Graaso, on 07 4040 7492 or email andrea_willats@health.qld.gov.au.

Adam Heaton
CONSENT FORM

Students' Section

I have read the attached letter.

☐ I choose not to be involved in Mr Heaton's research study and would prefer to partake in alternative English tasks.

☐ I am willing to participate in Mr Heaton's research study *Indigenous Perspective Development* as part of my regular English lessons in Term 2. I understand what is involved, and that any stage I may opt to withdraw my participation in these lessons and partake in alternative English tasks.

Signed

Name

Date 23.4.10

Parents' Section

I have read the attached letter.

☐ I choose for my child not to be involved in Mr Heaton's research study and would prefer for him/her to partake in alternative English tasks.

☐ I am willing for my child to participate in Mr Heaton's research study *Indigenous Perspective Development* as part of his/her regular English lessons in Term 2. I understand what is involved, and that any stage I or my son/daughter may opt to withdraw my participation in these lessons and partake in alternative English tasks.

Signed

Name

Date 23.4.10