

**THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERARY TEXTS  
IN A MONOCULTURAL SECONDARY  
SCHOOL CONTEXT AND STUDENTS'  
ATTITUDES TO THE 'CULTURAL OTHER'**

**MARY VLAHAKIS  
BA (Hons), Dip Ed**

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### Errata

Page, Paragraph, Line	As In Original	Correction
P4, 6 <sup>th</sup> line from bottom	'taken granted'	taken for granted
P5, 2 <sup>nd</sup> line from bottom	'conversant'	conversant,
P7, line 11 from top	'texts,'	texts
P7, line 15 from top	'far'	far,
P8, line 4 from top	'different than'	different from
P9, line 2 from bottom	'remain for new arrivals'	remain, for new arrivals,
P11, line 7 from top	'cultural and marginalized other'	cultural and/or marginalized other
P12, para. 2, line 11 from top	'Vygotsky,'	Vygotsky
P19, line 6 from top	'only,'	only
P22, line 6 from top	'speak'	speaking
P22, line 6 from top	'visibly different'	visibly different,
P23, line 1 from top	'cultural,'	cultural
P35, line 3 from top	'related'	is related
P35, line 1 from bottom	'conflict'	conflicts
P36, line 6 from top	'across two cultures'	across two different cultures
P40, para. 1, last sentence	'at secondary level'	at the secondary level
P66, para. 1, last word	'film'	film.
P78, line 3 from top	'the data'	the data,
P79, para. 2, line 3	'In Australia'	In Australia,
P80, para 3.3, line 4 from bottom	'students,'	students
P87, last line of page	'Aboriginal people'	Aboriginal people,
P87, last word on page	'Chapter'	Chapter.
P270, para. 2, last two sentences replaced	<b>Replacement</b>	
	This approach has direct application to the recent Australian Curriculum developments which promote the study of literary texts as a means of learning about other cultures and developing intercultural understanding.	

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to investigate how far the study of English literary texts, focused on ‘cultural or marginalised others’, could provide a substitute in imagination for the students’ lack of actual experience with the ‘cultural other’ and lead to a positive change in their understanding and attitudes. The students were from an Independent College in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia, where the predominance of Anglo-Australian culture made it difficult for the students to interact with others from different cultural backgrounds. Three main theorists were used to underpin the study and to analyse the data: Florian Znaniecki’s *humanistic* sociological concepts of group values and individual attitudes; Louise Rosenblatt’s educational theory of *aesthetic reading* and *transactional experience* emphasizing what should transpire between reader and the literary text; and Lev Vygotsky’s psychological theory of the *imaginational* processes in ‘higher mental development’. Over four years, the researcher, who was also the teacher, used an English classroom as the field of observation and investigation of students’ thoughts and feelings about ‘cultural others’. The literary texts studied as part of the English curriculum included those specifically chosen for their portrayal of themes related to people who were culturally different than the students. Four small scale qualitative studies were carried out at four different year levels. Prior to the study of selected texts in Years Nine and Ten, classes were asked to explain in writing what they knew and felt about the cultural group concerned. After study of the texts was completed, the students gave written responses to questions about the meaning and understanding of the text. The in-depth linguistic analysis of the students’ written comments, to the open ended questions, revealed what understanding and positivity of attitudes the students had toward people from other cultures before and after the study of

the literary texts. In the Year Nine study, the topic of investigation concerned Aboriginal people in Australia and the Year Ten topic was on Italian immigrants in Australia post World War Two. For Year Eleven, the teacher/researcher provided a 'memoir' on the dialectical discussions with the students on two World War One texts: one written by a German soldier and the other a poem written by a British soldier. In Year Twelve, when the students chose their own texts for study, they responded to four final evaluating questions concerning what values they had gained from their years of studying English literary texts. Overall, these small scale studies demonstrated that the aesthetic study of literary texts over four years could stimulate the students' higher mental processes of imagination. In general, participants emerged with a deepened understanding and greater positive attitudes toward the 'cultural other'. In their own minds, the students' monocultural experiences had been extended through the study of literary texts, although these attitudes were not yet tested by actual contact with multicultural 'others' in Australia.

## DECLARATION

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

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.....  
Mary Vlahakis  
2012



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## **DEDICATION**

To my husband Emmanuel for his constant  
and continual support of encouragement  
throughout my University and Post Graduate  
studies.

## **Chapter One: Introduction – Students from a Monocultural School Within a Multicultural Australian Society**

### **1.1 The Background to the Investigation**

This research had its nascent idea some eight years ago. It became apparent to the researcher that the schools in South Australia to which she was posted as a teacher of English were, primarily, monocultural. In the Australian context, monocultural environment most often means the dominant Anglo-Australian culture which reflected the situation for the school in this research. Monoculturalism may be seen as a form of limitation in the wider multicultural Australian and global context. The researcher became concerned with the constraints of a monocultural English classroom and how multicultural awareness could foster and broaden students' attitudes toward the 'cultural other'.

The multi and various peoples that now inhabit Australia have changed many cultural aspects of the nation: languages other than English, religions other than Christian, music, dances, foods and mores, in general, have enriched and integrated themselves within the original British fabric of the initial European settlement in Australia. This has not meant the disintegration of the original society, but over the 1970s and 1980s an inclusivity and acceptance of the different peoples residing in Australia began to be formulated and practiced through multicultural policy and actions. With these aspects in mind, the monocultural features of the schools, in which the researcher taught, contrasted sharply with the multicultural reality that existed in much of the wider Australian society. As a country, it was revealed in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2011)

statement that Australia is a multicultural nation. In all, since 1945, seven million people have migrated to Australia. It further stated that

*Diverse cultural expression enriches all Australians and makes our multicultural nation more vibrant and creative. An enduring theme of Australia's multicultural policy is that everyone belongs. We celebrate diversity and recognise that expressions of diversity sit within Australia's national legal framework . . . . Australia will continue to have an ever evolving and ever diversifying population* (Department of Immigration & Citizenship 2011, pp. 5-6).

Yet, many individuals and social groupings in Australian society have only been minimally touched by the waves of new immigrants and their diverse cultures. There are suburban districts, country towns and organisations, such as, social clubs, sporting teams, church congregations and schools, as well as families, which are made up predominantly of the mainstream Australian group derived from Great Britain. M.J. Secombe did a study of graduate students at the University of Adelaide mainly of Anglo-Australian background on the topic of cultural interaction. Some of the students revealed a monocultural existence. One such student stated, "My own education largely emphasized the English language and traditions. This was reinforced at home as well as at school." Another student quite pointedly asked "The point is, What's wrong with Monism? Provided an effective education for assimilation is provided" (Smolicz & Secombe 2000, pp. 276-277). This emphasizes that these students' particular and general conceptions reflect a large part of the mainstream group which now represents approximately fifty six percent of the population (percentages according to Department of Immigration & Citizenship 2011, p. 2). In addition, many have very little or minimal contact with the other forty four percent of Australians who have different cultural origins.

This research was centred on a co-educational Independent College which is situated geographically north of Adelaide. The socio-economic situation for the northern districts was on the lower end of the income spectrum. In a journal paper it was posited “that the opportunity of creating a supportive family learning environment for children is related to parents’ economic and human capital, which is measured by indicators of family socioeconomic status” (Marjoribanks & Kwok 1998, p. 99). By virtue of this socio-economic demographic situation, it would be fair to note that the majority of the parents sending their children to this type of college would have been a two-parent-employed unit, or a single parent who held two jobs in order to afford the fees to the college, albeit, considerably lower than other colleges in the leafy eastern and central suburbs of Adelaide. This was a disadvantage for many parents who did not have the time to supervise or comprehend students’ homework. A paper given at a Multicultural Education Conference revealed that a teacher from another northern independent college deduced that “We’re a white middle class ghetto” (Tyler, 2011).

The college, researched for this thesis, was co-educational with the gender balance approximately equal. Any cultural variations were difficult to identify as they were rarely expressed within the predominantly monocultural milieu of the school. The environs outside the school, such as, the many shopping centres, sporting clubs and other associations also, primarily, projected a monocultural environment; observation of these areas revealed, audibly, a scarcity of any languages other than English being spoken. Tyler’s paper also cites two teachers from the same independent college, in the northern districts of Adelaide, saying “we’re not multicultural – we’re unicultural” and “we’re not

multicultural at all” (Tyler, 2011). A unicultural school would be synonymous with a monocultural school environment.

Although, outwardly the Independent College of this research appears “unicultural”, some students according to their name and visible physical features revealed that they originated from a minority culture different from the dominant Anglo-Australian. Some of the students’ family names indicated clearly that their origins were from: Italy, Greece and Poland or other European States. The most obviously identifiable students were a few from Asia whose endeavours were to assimilate, if not physically then socially, into the fabric of the particular school. There was very little or no evidence of these students’ home background in the every day interchanges at the school. By this, it was meant that the students did not display any form of other language or behaviour to indicate that they were predisposed to a bicultural life style through their exposure to one culture at school and a different one at home. It was certainly not evident to teachers and fellow students within the school if a student was bicultural through maintaining the parental culture at home. There were not many such students and assimilation to the school’s monocultural Anglo-Australian environment appeared to be the taken for granted response by the few whose backgrounds were culturally different.

The situation of the majority students in this particular Independent College was similar to the demonstrated research carried out by Smolicz, Hudson and Secombe on the memoirs of respondents of English speaking backgrounds. They were described as “individuals [who] had not crossed cultural borders in any meaningful way, but remained

essentially within the confines of the dominant group which had provided the only culture they had been introduced to in their home and school contexts” (Smolicz, Hudson & Secombe 1998, p. 331). This exemplified the ‘monistic’ aspect of the school and was the situation for most of the students.

The persons who had not “crossed cultural borders” were the majority of the students and teachers of the school. Most of the teachers were of Anglo-Australian background, or expressed the dominant cultural aspect of the school. There were only a few teachers whose surnames indicated that their lineage was European or Asian. They linked their backgrounds to countries, such as, Italy, Poland, Greece, Malaysia, India and there would have been other teachers whose original cultures emanated from different countries than Australia, but this was inconspicuous to others. In all, there were approximately seventy teaching staff in the middle and senior schools who were either full or part-time educators. There were also, approximately, thirty Education Support Officers (ESO) that completed the staff at these two sections of the school.

The integration of the staff into the dominant Anglo-Australian culture of the school was the usual occurrence. By this, it is meant that there was little representation of other cultures which referred to the teaching staff or the staff in general. For instance, there were no multicultural events at the school and no other languages spoken which were discernable in the course of a school day. Whether a teacher made the students aware of another language, with which the teacher was conversant, or other aspects of another culture, was difficult to know. However, the tight schedule of each class time of

approximately forty minutes per lesson would indicate that there was little or no time available other than teaching the curriculum of a particular subject.

The school offered Indonesian as an academic language taught in middle and senior school classes. It was a Year Twelve subject and a small group of students studied this language in senior school as part of their South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). The curriculum, overall, was consistent with the SACE requirements. This included the core subjects of English and Maths as the integral literacy and numeracy subjects. The other subjects, such as, Science, Indonesian, History, Visual Arts, Music, Tourism, Physical Education, Food and Hospitality, were part of the general curriculum. A study of Religious Education was compulsory through to Year Twelve.

In this broad spectrum of the curriculum, there were opportunities to introduce cultures of other nationalities and this was probably done in some subjects. However, such efforts were done, mainly, on a theoretical basis, rather than an experiential one. An exception might be the Indonesian class in the senior school who visited an Indonesian restaurant to indulge in the epicurean culture of that country. Apart from food which had become a strong symbol of a nation's cultural distinction, the importance of acknowledging other cultural emblems of a nation, such as, music, art and not least of all language, could have been a prime preference in education. Unfortunately, this hardly occurred and whether it was the constraints of time to accommodate these aspects of other people's cultures, it did not become a reality. It would appear that assimilation into the majority cultural environment was a lot easier.



The attaining of mature, open attitudes to the ‘cultural other’ by students within a monocultural school context was the focus of investigation in this research study. The monocultural school experience may be reinforced by limited experiences with people of other backgrounds outside of school. Thus students may have little or no regular contact with the ‘other’ whom they could recognize as culturally different, or marginalised by behaviour or appearance, disability or socio-economic status. The ‘other’ might be defined as a minority cultural or marginalized group (or single person) who was perceived as different on other grounds.

This research sought to investigate how far this lack of interactivity by the students of the school with people from ethnic minority groups could be replaced by the reading of English literary texts which were focused on the lives of ‘cultural others’. According to Louise Rosenblatt, in her discussion of an individual’s response to text, it was “From the linkage of his<sup>1</sup> own experiences with the words, from his own store of memories, he must draw the appropriate elements symbolized by the score or text, to structure a new experience, the work of art” (Rosenblatt 1978, p. 14). This research investigated how far, through in-depth *aesthetic reading* of carefully selected texts in the English literature course, a student could gain a *transactional experience* of the emotions and the intellect and identify with the ‘cultural other’ in an empathic and compassionate manner. Egan and Gajdamaschko have argued that the “complex nature of the cognitive tools of literacy, if introduced properly in teaching, encourages not only development of logical operations but development of imagination, self-reflection, emotions and an awareness of

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<sup>1</sup> At the time this was written ‘his’ or ‘he’ were regarded as referring to both male and female. Rosenblatt stated that “A reminder of when the book first appeared is the generic *he*, then taken for granted, no matter how feminist, as in this case, the writer might be.” (Rosenblatt 1995, p. xix).

the child's own thinking" (Egan & Gajdamaschko 2010, p. 9). Was it possible then for interaction with English literature to become the pivotal link to stimulate the students' imagination and enable them to mould new experiences of people who were different from them in important ways?

## **1.2 The Influence of Monocultural Schools**

The effect that a monocultural school has upon the minority students that are bicultural is as important as the effect it has on the majority of the students who form the dominant cultural environment at a school.

### **(a) *Students of Minority Background***

Generally, the research reported the influence of monocultural schools on the assimilation of a few students who were bicultural. A study by J.J. Smolicz and M.J. Secombe has demonstrated the importance of some of the negative influences of monocultural Australian schools on children of minority background. In their research of *The Australian School through Children's Eyes* 1981, they illuminated the differing cultural values of the Australian school and the Polish students' background. The analysis of memoirs written by Polish young people led Smolicz and Secombe to ascertain that there was a

*failure to transmit the Polish language, and that the Australian school also had considerable influence on the memoir writers' tendencies to use Polish, through the transmission of the ideological value of monolingualism that prevailed in society generally. . . It was implicitly assumed that English was, and should be, the only language of instruction in the school, the only language of communication between students, even in the playground, and the only language of Australian society as a whole (Smolicz & Secombe 1981, p. 98).*

This naturally produced paradoxical academic outcomes in that the “Australian school was seen as an agency for upward mobility” for the Polish students and their families. The high level of academic achievement was in a language which was not their mother tongue. Many of these students succeeded

*in spite of, not because of, the school, through the abilities and the perseverance of the children themselves and the active encouragement of their parents. Nevertheless, the schools functioned as the means by which these children could fulfil their own and their parents’ aspirations (Smolicz & Secombe, 1981, p. 115).*

The above research highlighted the monocultural aspect of the Australian school environment in which English was used as the predominant language. The study was published in 1981 and depicted that the students’ “parents did not originate in British society, but from the Polish cultural tradition” (Smolicz & Secombe, 1981, p. 1). This first generation of Polish-Australian students living and studying in Australia found the English language, hermeneutically and grammatically, difficult to learn. Some of these same problematic features still prevail in the early twenty-first century with immigrant students from other ethnic backgrounds. The time difference between this researcher’s study and Smolicz and Secombe’s investigation is one whole generation apart. The assimilation factor of today’s students in some schools to the dominant Anglo-Australian culture is much as it was twenty-five years ago. Within the Australian context, monocultural aspects of some schools remain, for new arrivals, as prominent as for post-war immigrant students.

For many immigrants and their children participation in work, social, economic life, education and politics become inextricably connected with the dominant culture for those seeking “upward mobility” in the new society. This may be best explained through a metaphoric example by the use of Karl Marx’s *Capital* where the “Exchange-values of a given commodity express something equal; secondly, exchange-value, generally, is only the mode of expression, the phenomenal form, of something contained in it, yet distinguishable from it” (Marx, 1999, p. 269). Although Marx wrote here of “material depositories of exchange-value,” it could be metamorphosed into idealism of what Marx originally observed and wanted to change: the unequal “exchange” of “values” as practised in society. This idea becomes relevant to this research in that there were “unequal” exchange of cultural “values” within a monocultural school and community. It was difficult for a student who might be of a minority ethnic group to practise or share his/her cultural tendencies within such an environment. An example of this would be their ethnic language which was often regarded as an intrusion into the dominant language practised by the majority. This could also apply to difference in physicality, code of dress, disability of any other kind which often stigmatised a person as the outsider or the ‘cultural other’.

Smolicz argued that “cultural interaction with members of other groups represents one of the most effective ways of triggering positive attitude to other group members, eliminating racism within individuals themselves, and rendering them potential agents for building reconciliation.” (Smolicz 2001, p. 67). This particular research demonstrates how the monocultural school, as an environment, provides a paucity of regular interaction

with the ‘cultural other’. The research endeavoured to discover how attitudes and understanding could be modified for students whose knowledge and understanding of a culturally plural society and of the ‘other’ were absent in the students’ environment: school, home and elsewhere. The researcher looked toward the study of English literary texts, within a classroom, to evaluate and analyse how far these texts could help to formulate knowledge, broaden understanding and deepen attitudes toward the ‘cultural and/or marginalised other’.

**(b) *Students of Majority Background***

One of the problems in a monocultural school was the revelation that there was very little regular interaction with ‘cultural others’ either within or without the school’s environment. The majority of the students from the mainstream culture failed to experience the benefits of a multicultural environment; most were unaware that they were missing out on any benefits, at all. Some researchers have ardently argued for this state of educational affairs to alter (Smolicz 2001). B. Barber had, also, passionately endeavoured to address this problem, albeit, in America and demonstrated that there were ways to positively challenge the state of monoculturalism. He posited that

*(R)espect for the full diversity and plurality of American life is possible only when students have an opportunity to interact outside of the classroom in ways that are, however, the subject of scrutiny of open discussion in the classroom learning and group work outside the classroom has the greatest likelihood of impacting on student ignorance, intolerance, and prejudice (Barber 1994, p. 225).*

Although Barber referred specifically to the American context of teaching “diversity and plurality”, it is, nonetheless, as relevant in Australia as in America. The understanding of

cultural differences, through experience and interaction with a multicultural community influences the students in a profound way. However, in the absence of this sort of practical interaction, as the case for the Independent College, the task remained: how might the students experience the ‘cultural other’ and what would emanate from such an experience? To what extent could the English literary text influence how the students cognitively processed the meanings of the texts to achieve knowledge, understanding and eventually positive attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’.

### **1.3 Stimulating Cognitive Development Toward Understanding**

This study comments on, primarily, sociological, educational and psychological concepts in interpreting social attitudes, understanding literature and cognitive processes. In the cognitive processes, the work of Lev Vygotsky adds a rich explanatory factor to our understanding of the child’s mental processes, particularly of their imagination in response to classroom texts. Vygotsky’s work was analysed by Kierin Egan and Natalia Gajdamschko with a view that

*Literacy from the Vygotskian perspective as a much more complex cultural phenomenon, we need to recognize that literacy will bring a new set of cognitive tools to the child. It is not only the mechanics of writing to which a child is being introduced in school but the whole new system of cognitive psychological tools that literature has historically stored within itself* (Egan & Gajdamschko 2010, p. 8).

This Vygotskian approach concerns itself with “forms of consciousness, or kinds of understanding which encourages not only development of logical operations, but development of imagination, self-reflection, emotions and an awareness of the child’s own thinking” (Egan & Gajdamschko 2010, p. 9). With English literary texts the

student's mind could encounter qualities that a character in such a text might exemplify, such as, compassion, empathy, justice, courage in any situation presented to the student (Egan & Gajdamschko 2010, p. 13). The desire is that through the exposure to these texts, the students' current meanings of the 'cultural other' and where appropriate the 'marginalised other', might be transcended to evoke broader and more inclusive attitudes. Such notions might be internalised through the individual student's imagination where "thinking" and "feeling" occur to create complex personalised mental images within the student's mind. Where students do not experience these notions through regular interaction with the 'cultural other,' the issue for this research was whether they could be experienced through the imagination as individual internalised images. In the absence of experience with people from other cultures, it was important to analyse how far the students' imaginative minds could comprehend, affectively, the thematic meanings of a text based on 'cultural others'.

Educationist and linguist, Louise M. Rosenblatt, showed how to stimulate the mind in the classroom through the in-depth *aesthetic reading* of the literary text and encourage the *transactional experience* which became more than the student's mere reading of the text. It resulted in an 'event', an 'experience' which involved the student and the author's narrative through stimulating the imagination and educing experiential meanings. Similarly, the essence of various essays, edited by Dennis Patrick Slattery and Jennifer Leigh Selig (2008), emphasize that at the heart of learning is the soul and psyche affected by understanding of imagery.

Another who contributed to understanding “the heart of learning” was Elizabeth Fergus-Jean, a visual artist and educator. Her essay ‘Till We Have Faces: Image as Psyche’ (2008) disclosed the importance of fostering the individual soul within each student through appealing to personal perception of interpreted images. As an educationist, Kristina Love (2001) also, conjectured in her article that ‘The Construction of Moral Subjectivities’ can take place in the talk commonly conducted in classrooms around an English text. Similarly, Peter Willis’ article ‘Getting a Feel for the Work: Mythopoetic Pedagogy for Adult Educators Through Phenomenological Evocation’ (2008) contributed to recognising the metaphoric teaching processes that take place in a classroom.

From the social theorists, such as Znaniecki, to the psychological theories of Vygotsky and Rosenblatt’s educational theory, their concepts were used to highlight the learning realities of a school classroom with an educator and a room full of students studying English literature. The important transition between theory and practice is achieved here. More in-depth discussion about educationists and theorists are presented in Chapter Two.

#### **1.4 Aims and Scope of the Research**

It was the aim of this research to use the humanistic sociological model of culture and society, educational theories and psychological concepts, to come to a clearer understanding of how the effects of monocultural schools could be countered. The intention was to provide students in such a school with the opportunity to discover a means of experiencing the ‘cultural other’ through the study and analysis of literary texts within an English classroom setting. The understanding gained might eventually assist



them to actually interact in a more knowledgeable and understanding manner with others from different cultures and those people who were marginalised or regarded as on the edges of society, because of some disability, disfigurement or anti-social behaviour.

The scope of this research about the influence of the literary texts on the students' attitudes toward the 'cultural other', was one group of students in a single Independent School. Four in-depth studies were conducted with this small group of students beginning in Year Nine and concluding in Year Twelve. The number of students in the class varied from year to year depending on their choice of subjects and academic abilities. The school streamed students for English and Maths from Year Nine and most of the students were considered the most capable in the classes with which this research was concerned. Over the period of four years, the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of how the students' values and attitudes toward the 'cultural other' developed over this time. Hence, the Year Eleven study consisted of the teacher's memoir concerning the same students' classroom discussions on the literary texts chosen for that year.

Another important aspect of this investigation was the use of educational psychological theory related to higher mental development which might shed light on the student's cognitive interaction with the literary texts. Certain pedagogical concepts, for instance, *scientific concepts* or *zone of proximal development*, needed to be instigated for students' cognitive understanding of the meanings within the English literary texts. From the imaginal experience could come the development of attitudes toward the 'cultural other'.

Therefore the aim of this research was:

to investigate how far the classroom study of literary texts, focussed on the ‘cultural other’ and or ‘marginalised other’, could influence understanding of and attitudes to persons considered as different through their culture or behaviour. To carry out this aim a framework was developed of sociological, educational and psychological concepts which could be used to analyse any changes in the participants’ understanding of and attitudes toward ‘cultural others’. It was also necessary to find a method of gathering the students’ thoughts and feelings in relation to the texts and a way of analysing their comments to highlight their experience of reading the text and any changes in cognitive processes and attitudes to the ‘cultural other’ or ‘marginalised other’.

### **1.5 Structure of Thesis**

The Chapter that follows develops a conceptual framework for understanding the students in their monocultural environment. It includes the sociological, educational and psychological influences of studying within the English classroom certain literary texts which were focussed on the experiences of ‘cultural others’. Chapter Three explains the method used to gather and analyse the data. The next three chapters analyse the students’ written responses gathered in the four year level studies. In Chapter Seven, the conclusions that flow from the analysis are elucidated.

It is important to mention, at this point, that the Present Tense is primarily utilised in this thesis. Unless it is chronologically necessary, the Present Tense prevails in the rest of the thesis for reasons that are explained in Chapter Three.

A monocultural environment exists in many schools in Australia without teachers and students being aware of it. Hence, there is a continuing and particular need for those of the majority or mainstream group to understand the ‘cultural other’ in their own society – those Australians who belong to groups with cultures and languages different than their own. If students in monocultural situations can experience the richness and benefits of other cultures, through the study of literary texts, they may be able to make meaning of what it is to live in a multicultural nation, such as, Australia. These issues are considered more in the discussion of literature around this topic in Chapter Two.

## Chapter Two: Social and Cultural Contexts, Aesthetic Reading of the English Literary Text and Cognitive Processes

This chapter seeks to develop from the theories and research studies of earlier scholars a conceptual framework which can be used for the research topic outlined at the end of Chapter One. It begins by discussing the context of the study. It investigates the nature and extent of cultural and linguistic diversity in Australian society, as well as the development of multicultural policies, especially in relation to schools. The wider social and cultural outcomes of the students' study of the literary text are examined through Znaniecki's *humanistic sociological* theory of the essential interaction between a group's cultural values and the attitudes of individuals as members of various social groups. In addition, Kloskowska's juxtaposition of the concept of *national identification* and *cultural valency* is outlined, as well as, Bauman's elucidation of personal identity as a functioning process of negotiation between various *in-groups* and *out-groups*. Next, the possibilities within the English classroom of students being engaged in *aesthetic reading* and *transactional experiences* of the text, as a means of coming to an imaginative understanding of the 'cultural other' are considered. Vygotsky's concepts, related to *higher levels of learning*, are then acknowledged, in order to explain what students cognitively process through the imagination to affect attitudes. The chapter concludes by outlining a conceptual framework for the investigation of the extent to which a study of English literary texts can contribute towards the formation of more positive attitudes to the 'cultural other'.

## **2.1 Australia as a Multicultural Society**

Australia is highly recognised as a culturally pluralistic society for the great range of diversity among its people. Its initial immigrants were those first convicts from Britain and their accompanying naval officers and sailors in 1788 who imposed themselves upon the existing Aboriginal peoples, their different cultures and their lands in New South Wales. Over the next two centuries immigrants came, not only from Britain and Europe, but from all over the world, including Asia, Africa and the Pacific in search of gold, a better life and freedom.

For the first seventy years of the twentieth century, however, immigration was restricted. The so called White Australia Policy, enacted when the Australian States federated in 1901, was designed to exclude those regarded as undesirable – those whose skin colour was not white, whose background was not British and who could not speak English (Jupp 2001). The acceptance of European refugees after World War Two, and subsequently of immigrants from Italy and Greece, was the first breaking down of this immigration barrier. The Whitlam government finally abolished the Immigration Restriction Act in 1973. Under the Fraser government from 1975, there was a substantial increase in the number of refugees accepted in Australia from Vietnam, Cambodia and later immigrants from other countries in Asia and most recently Africa (Jupp 2001). Over the years, all these new immigrants have brought with them into Australia their own home languages and cultures.

According to the 2011 figures, the Australian population, after more than 220 years of European settlement, is 22 million. About a quarter or twenty-four per cent are immigrants, themselves, in that they were born overseas, while another twenty per cent have at least one parent who is an immigrant. In total, therefore, just under half of the current Australian population was either born overseas or has one parent born overseas (Department of Immigration & Citizenship 2011, p. 2). Australians, overall, identify with some 270 ancestries and practice a range of religions. Over 260 languages, other than English, which Clyne (2005; 1997) referred to as Australian community languages, are spoken in Australia.

Table 2.1 below reveals the top twenty community languages spoken in Australia in 2001 and indicates the percentage fluctuations from 1991. Figures from the 2011 census are not yet available and there are no comparable figures based on 2006 figures

**TABLE 2.1** Top 20 Community Languages in Australia, 2001, with Percentage Change from 1991

Language	Speakers in 2001	Percentage change since 1991	Language	Speakers in 2001	Percentage change since 1991
Italian	353 606	-15.6	Croatian	69 850	+10.7
Greek	263 718	-7.7	Polish	59 056	-11.8
Cantonese	225 307	+38.9	Turkish	50 692	+20.8
Arabic	209 371	+28.6	Serbian	49 202	+102.2
Vietnamese	174 236	+58.1	Hindi	47 817	+110.4
Mandarin	139 288	+155.9	Maltese	41 392	-21.9
Spanish	95 595	+3.4	Dutch	40 187	-14.7
Tagalog (Filipino)	78 879	+33.4	French	39 643	-12.9
German	76 444	-32.6	Korean	39 528	+100.1
Macedonian	71 994	+11.7	Indonesian	38 724	+42.4

SOURCE – Based on Clyne and Kipp (2002)

It can be seen that Italian and Greek are still the two most widely used languages in Australia, however, the Cantonese, Arabic, Vietnamese and Mandarin languages also have more than 100,000 home users of their language (Clyne 2005, p. 6). The more prolific use of Asian languages in the home, evident in the 2001 figures, is due to the recent arrivals of the Asian people to Australia. The above figures also distinctly demonstrate a decrease in numbers of persons speaking languages from Europe, within the ten year period of 1991 to 2001, which may be due to a reduction in immigration from those countries and the declining numbers of the post-war immigrants to Australia. On the positive side, there have been substantial increases in those speaking Mandarin, Hindi, Serbian and Korean, as well as growth in those speaking Vietnamese, Indonesian, Cantonese, Tagalog and Turkish.

In the Australian context, such linguistic and cultural variations are seen to be derived from minority ethnic groups which are marked out from the majority by their language use, religion, family and friendship patterns, including their food, festivals and music. In some cases, there are also differences in appearance, such as skin colour, facial features and body build. According to Stone, ethnic groups can be understood, following Weber, as groups of people who share a sense of common ancestry and culture (Stone 2003, pp. 32-33). On this basis, all individuals have links to one or more ethnic groups. In particular, the term 'ethnic' applies equally to the members of the majority group in Australia, who originated from Great Britain. It also helps to highlight the different ethnic origins - English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish and Cornish – to be found within the majority group (Smolicz 2001).

Furthermore, as in most plural societies, a number of those who arrive as immigrants in Australia prefer *not* to identify with the ethnic group of their birth, but to be seen as members of the majority or mainstream group. This shift, both in personal identification and recognition by others, is possible only for those whose appearance enables them to pass as members of the majority group and who can activate its cultural patterns, in particular, speaking English fluently and without an accent. Those who are visibly different, speak with a marked accent, or are unfamiliar with the accepted mainstream ways of relating to others, are not likely to be easily accepted as a member of the majority group.

Australia, then, is not a monistic entity, either biologically or culturally.

*The very existence of Aboriginal people makes any notion that Australians are just of Anglo-Saxon, of Anglo-Celtic or even just of European descent, an absurd concept (Bourke, Bourke and Edwards (1994), as does the growing number of Asian-Australians (Price 1993). The same holds for cultural values (Smolicz 2001, p. 75).*

It is appropriate then to ask whether one nation can accommodate complex diverse ethnic groups and to find a common Australian identity. Some writers, such as, H. Reynolds, a journalist with *The Australian* (in Smolicz 2001, p. 75), have rejected the concept of a common national identity and have advocated a “new civic identity”, where there is a separation of culture and a “commitment to the rule of law, to the Constitution as amended by the Australian people, to the principles of parliamentary democracy and to the maintenance of Australia as an actively democratic community”. The concepts of “civic identity” and “cultural identity” are far too intertwined to be separated. If all



Australians are equal under law “irrespective of race, sex, ethnicity and creed” then the boundary between the civic and the cultural become merged.

Smolicz has taken a wider view of the cultural and included the civic within it. He argued instead for a consensus on the key elements which could be accepted by all Australians as a common, societal framework, or what he called the shared values overarching the diverse ethnic groups.

*Members of the contributing cultures would be expected to fit in with, and not violate, the overarching values. At the same time, however, the framework is assumed not to be a rigid structure . . . but to be flexible enough to respond to changes both in patterns of cultural diversity and in the needs of the nation as a whole (Smolicz 2001, p. 75).*

Overarching values are considered to include the dominant group’s laws and patterns of government, a common language (in this instance, English), economic structures and a recognition of the importance of cultural diversity in Australia. The acceptance of these guarantees a degree of cohesion in society (Smolicz 2001, p. 99).

Complementing these overarching values is the theory of core values (Smolicz 1981b; 1991) which refers to what group members regard as the heart of their culture and defining their cultural identity. The maintenance of these core values is vital for the survival of a group’s culture as a creative source of identification and living for its members. These core values vary from one group to another and may involve: an ethno-specific language, religion, family structure or an attachment to a native land. Greek, Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Polish, Spanish and Hungarian are some groups which place prime importance on their ethnic language (Secombe & Zajda 1999, p. 28). On the other hand, the Jewish people provide an example of a group for which religious values

and attachment to the native land (Israel) is of paramount importance. Kloskowska's study of social and cultural elites in Poland pointed to a "canon of national culture" which becomes "deeply internalized" and "cherished" by most individuals in the nation (Kloskowska 1992, pp. 59-60; Smolicz 2001).

Where diverse cultural groups co-exist within the boundaries of a single state, they can function harmoniously as a multicultural nation when the balance between the core values of minority groups and the over-arching values of the whole society is respected and understood in theoretical and practical terms. It is important for the minority groups to retain their core values as an integral part of their identity, while the common values and structures which overarch all the groups need to be upheld in society as a whole. In other words, "Multiculturalism that is stable yet dynamic is characterised by the acceptance of shared institutions by all groups, and consequent modifications in the culture of each group" (Smolicz 2001, p. 101). The maintenance of minority core values marks out the point of balance; if they are lost or abandoned the society ceases to be authentically multicultural.

Over time, individual and public interpretation of multiculturalism has varied with more limited on transient versions being readily accepted. In this regard M.J. Secombe stated that

*Some people regarded it primarily in transitional terms, believing that minority cultures would fade away with the deaths of the first generation of non-British migrants. Still others looked upon multiculturalism as a residual phenomenon with Australia retaining the essentially Anglo-Celtic cultural heritage of the*

*mainstream group, but accepting minor cultural modifications on the periphery* (Secombe 1997, p. 2).

The extent of public support for multicultural policies has also fluctuated in response to practical situations, such as, the arrival of refugee boat people, and the positive or negative stances adopted toward these people by the political leaders of the day (Fraser 2010).

In addition, it is important to recognise that over half the Australian population in 2006 was born in Australia to Australian-born parents. Many were born into families which had been in Australia for four, five or more generations and activated the culture patterns of mainstream Anglo-Australian group. Some of these interact with Australians whose identity and cultural activation are linked to a minority ethnic group, in contexts, such as, work, neighbourhood, social or leisure activities. Where such relations are limited to the particular context, transient or more formal in nature, they are referred to as *secondary* (see Section 2.3). Sometimes, these have developed into more intimate and enduring primary relationships of close friendship and even marriage with those of a different cultural background to their own (Secombe 1997).

In contrast, other Anglo-Australians live out their lives having minimal contact with those who are culturally different. There are some suburban locales, some rural towns, some work situations, some churches, some leisure and sporting clubs, some schools where individuals come predominantly from the Anglo-Australian group. The few exceptions are individuals of minority ethnic background who prefer to assimilate to and identify with the majority group. The reality of such monocultural contexts, despite the extent of

cultural diversity in Australian society at large, was demonstrated in two qualitative studies of the intercultural experiences of respondents of mainstream background.

Dorothy Hudson's study of sixteen graduates of Anglo-Australian background found that none had learned another language or culture. Half were monistic in their attitudes in that they expected their mainstream culture to prevail in Australia and new arrivals to assimilate to it. The other half revealed pluralistic attitudes in that they were positive to cultural diversity in Australia. They had interacted with those of another cultural background and had come to appreciate their languages and cultures. The two chief factors influencing these positive attitudes were friendships with those of other backgrounds which were made in the course of their university studies and opportunities for extended or repeated overseas travel (Hudson 1995).

Another study of forty-three education graduates of mainstream background found that thirteen were living within the monocultural world they favoured, having minimal contact with those of minority ethnic background. Another fourteen associated with those of different backgrounds, but always in contexts where mainstream culture prevailed. Although they were generally positive to the idea of multiculturalism, they had not themselves had any experience of another culture. In contrast, there were sixteen respondents who described the ways they had participated in other cultures either within Australia or overseas. They were personally positive to multiculturalism in Australia (Secombe 1997).

The educational response to the reality of cultural and linguistic diversity in Australia can be seen as a continuum, from positive acceptance to indifference and even rejection of cultural diversity in favour of a monocultural society. Some schools with diverse student populations have welcomed multicultural policies. Teachers have developed curricula, approaches to student learning and an overall school ethos which have reflected and supported the students' diversity. Other schools with predominantly mainstream students have made few, if any, changes to the range of subjects offered, the sorts of topics or themes explored within subject areas, or the school's organisation and approach to students. The few students who are of minority ethnic background are expected to adapt to the mainstream school structures and patterns of behaviour.

One of the chief indicators of positive response to multiculturalism in Australia is the program in languages other than English which schools offer. The learning of a language opens doors to understanding and appreciating another person's culture, traditions and life. This holds true both for immigrant children learning the language of the Australian majority group or for mainstream students learning an Australian community or global language. The ideal, of course, is for both groups to be bilingual or better still, multi-lingual (Smolicz 1979). However, learning another language represents a particular challenge for mainstream students. According to M. Berthold, in the Australian linguistic situation "There is only one official language, and there is no one significantly large non-English speaking minority. The majority of students, and the community at large, do not place much value on learning another language as English is considered sufficient for them in their employment and day to day existence" (Berthold 1992, p. 112).

One school which tackled the challenge of mainstream students learning another language and overcame the many obstacles involved was Benowa State High School which in 1985 introduced the experimental idea of “immersion language teaching”. This radical approach meant that a group of year eight students who had no background in another language other than English was taught Mathematics, Science and Music through the French language. It was an innovative programme with successful results, since the “immersion class’s average mark equalled that of the best English-only class. In all subsequent term tests during that first year, the immersion Maths class significantly outperformed all of the other 13 Year 8 classes” (Berthold 1995, p. 28).

It is an inspiring achievement and although there are other schools who have adopted this idea it still requires much courage and innovation of the mind and heart to implement it on a larger scale, particularly in the climate of financial constraint which has prevailed in recent years. As Berthold stated,

*One cannot afford therefore to judge too harshly the tentative steps taken in Australia in this linguistic domain, nor apply or expect the same standards of achievement that one can more readily expect from an officially bilingual country. We must be valued according to our own linguistic demography”* (Berthold 1992, p. 112).

Since the late 1970s, there have been in Australia multicultural policies which encouraged “ethnic groups to maintain their home languages” (Berthold, 1995, p. 10). By 1991, Clyne was able to claim that in Victoria there were “17 languages in state primary schools, including Italian, Greek, German, Chinese, Turkish, Japanese, Macedonian and French” which were being used in a bilingual way to teach another school subject (in Berthold’s 1995, p. 10). These initiatives in language teaching,

however, have often been subject to fluctuations when the principals and teachers concerned moved on to new positions, the available funding resources were reduced or the student population changed. Moreover, at senior secondary and tertiary levels, the number of students choosing to study a language remains comparatively low.

However, there still remain too many schools whose environment is of a monocultural nature and the perceived ideology is that it is fine to remain as such. These perceptions are often perpetuated by the lack of other languages spoken in school, by students whose background may be ethnic, but prefer to assimilate in the majority Anglo-Australian culture to avoid any kind of stigma that may be attached to someone who is different either in appearance or in behaviour. Often the monocultural school is condoned by the parents of the students, but their attitude to their immediate environs, such as, shopping centres, sporting clubs, work place and social organisations, is also reflective of an apathy toward change.

In M.J. Secombe's research (1997), it is revealed that some of the mainstream students had, in her study, very little contact with people from other cultures, even though these students were at tertiary level, which usually affords a student greater possibility of coming into direct contact with others from different cultures. These tertiary students "expressed a preference for Australia to be a society where mainstream culture prevailed (Secombe 1997, p. 130). Some of the students explained the need for minority individuals to assimilate from an economic point of view. One such student states that if "the host group's language is the economic language [it] is in itself enough of a

conforming force” (Secombe 1997, p. 132). Another student declared his opinion in stronger terms by stating that there was a real danger of “representing melting-pot assimilation and synthesis as an equalising and democratic process of absorption. It is not – majorities always prevail” (Secombe 1997, p. 137). Another student who worked at a university admitted that “I personally would be more likely to retain [rather than change] my indifference” (Secombe 1997, p. 145) to those who are culturally different.

In a sense, there is security in retaining and remaining within the majority culture. However, what these respondents fail to acknowledge is that the lack of interaction with people from other cultures becomes a personal drawback and societal limitation, considering how multicultural Australia is as a nation and how important global interaction has become. This research investigates the attitudes of students with little or no exposure to other languages or cultures and the extent to which the study of literary texts in an English classroom may help them to experience the ‘cultural other’, if not in practical terms, then vividly within their imagination.

Australia’s success as a multicultural society remains limited by its failure to make the benefits of multilingualism an integral part of the experience of all Australians. Michael Clyne exclaimed ironically, “Almost 50 years on [from the first teaching of Australia’s community languages] and we still get a politician opining in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that to be monolingual and linguistically uniform is the smart way to go about being a nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century . . . lucky country, indeed!” (Clyne 2010, p. 1). Clyne supplied



on his internet blog a statement on the detrimental effects of a country with a “monolingual mindset.” He cited the economic limitations of a country whose

*linguistic uniformity is not a cause for celebration but one for lament! The monolingual mindset is hurting Australia as a recent report by the Australian Academy of the Humanities shows. The Communiqué of the National Languages Summit blames “complacent and aggressive monolingualism” for “our national deficit in language capability, (...) Australia’s great unrecognised skills shortage – and the one most directly relevant to our competitiveness, security, prosperity and social harmony in an increasingly global environment (Clyne 2010, p. 1). (Underlining in original text).*

Clyne’s succinct condemnation of the monolingual assumptions of Australia’s society is relevant to the situation in many monocultural schools. Although, other languages are taught in most schools, they are often regarded as extraneous part of the syllabus which is of interest only to the small group of students who actually study them through to Year Twelve.

## **2.2 Values and Attitudes Interaction in Humanistic Sociological Theory**

Understanding individuals as social and cultural beings was the aim of Florian Znaniecki who as one of the first humanistic sociologists, collaborated with William I. Thomas and Robert M. MacIver to produce a variant of the social action theory. At the turn of the twentieth century Thomas and Znaniecki published *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* in five volumes between 1918 and 1920.

Znaniecki claimed that “In studying the society we go from the whole social context to the problem, and in studying the problem we go from the problem to the whole social context” (Znaniecki 1969, p. 68). As Robert Bierstedt explained in his introduction to a

selection of Znaniecki's key writings *On Humanistic Sociology* (1969), Znaniecki believed that the investigation of social and cultural life "can be as objective, as precise, and as penetrating an investigation in the other sciences; and that sociology, though properly limited in scope, is nevertheless the basic cultural science" (Znaniecki 1969, p. 34). His concern with culture was focussed simultaneously on: "(1) the problem of the dependence of the individual upon social organization and culture and (2) the problem of the dependence of social organization and culture upon the individual" (Znaniecki 1969, p. 69; Dulczewski 2000).

There are two key concepts in Znaniecki's theory: *group values* and *individual attitudes*. "We call natural objects *things*, cultural objects *values*, in view of their essential practical determination with reference to human activity". Usually they are associated with other values in systems of cultural values: political, religious, linguistic, artistic, family, to name a few (Znaniecki 1969, p. 140). A cultural value is for Znaniecki "any datum having an empirical content accessible to the members of some social group and a meaning with regard to which it is or may be an object of activity . . . The meaning of . . . value becomes explicit . . . in connection with human actions" (Ziólkowski 2000, p. 122; Znaniencki 1969). Znaniecki proceeds to give examples of values that have meanings, such as, an instrument for its unique design, a coin for its buying and selling power and at a more pragmatic level, for its economic value in terms of how much it will buy, or a piece of poetry for "the sentimental and intellectual reactions which it arouses". This would also apply to any literary text where the author has expressed "feelings and idea. . . [for] the reader's sympathy and admiration" (Znaniecki 1969, p.70; Dulczewski 2000).

A group's cultural values invariably connect with the individual attitudes of group members. An attitude can be understood as the process of individual consciousness which decides "real or "possible" action in a given social world. Znaniecki uses the examples of someone who is a spendthrift and cannot resist using the coin's purchasing power; the poet who wishes to express his feelings and ideas in a poem which may create "admiration" and "sympathy" from the reader; or the interest created among those who wish to understand and apply a scientific theory – all of these are attitudes. He further signifies that the "attitude is thus the individual counterpart of the social [or cultural] value; activity, in whatever form, is the bond between them" (Znaniecki 1969, pp. 70-71).

In the example of the spendthrift, reflecting on the attitude formed within his consciousness leads to activity to spend the coin; the coin, with its economic meaning in buying and selling transactions, is the value. Thus, the activity, in relation to the social world, renders the attitude more than just a psychical state. This example requires 'idea' and 'volitions' which have been abstracted from the 'objective social reality', this being a society in which the spendthrift is unable to control his spending. Therefore,

*An attitude is a psychological process treated as primarily manifested in its reference to the social world and taken first of all in connection with social value . . . The psychological process remains always fundamentally a state of somebody; the attitude remains always fundamentally an attitude towards something (Znaniecki 1969, p. 71).*

This connectivity between value and attitude determines human activity: the spending of the coin and the pleasure it produces; the proficiency with which the instrument is used; the ideas and emotions derived from works of literature for the reader.

For Znaniecki then, an attitude is more than just a psychological state of being in an individual. In contrast, the psychological state is what interests Vygotsky, particularly as it relates to learning from a cultural/social interaction (discussed in section 2.9). What Znaniecki is interested in is the way an individual attitude is related to actual or possible activity in a particular cultural and social context. For him, values and attitudes go hand-in-hand in the cultural life of a group and its individual members.

The interaction between group values and individual attitudes is important as the source of cultural change. As an example, Znaniecki describes the family life of Polish immigrants in America where signs of “decay” appear to indicate the dissolving of the family unit. This becomes a concern to the American social and political institutions of the time which deem this as unbecoming American standards of family life. The attempt by welfare officers to guide the immigrants into proper patterns of family behaviour becomes a destructive intrusion rather than constructive support. The Polish immigrants in a new country have lost some of their cohesion, but not entirely their sense of being a Polish community with the social institutions which they have brought from the old country. Importantly, among these is

*the principle of the family as a social institution – the principle of solidarity. An individual who accepts external interference in his favour against a family member sins against this principle [which is the fundamental cultural value of the group] and a break of family relations must be thus the natural consequence of the well intentioned but insufficiently enlightened external activities” (Znaniecki 1969, p. 93).*

What the well meaning Anglo-American social workers, with their assumptions of nuclear individually oriented family life, did not factor into their dealings with the

disintegrating family life of the Polish immigrants in America at the turn of the twentieth century was the pre-existing Polish value of “the principle of solidarity” in family life.

Although this account of the Polish immigrants’ family life is related to situations which occurred many decades ago, similar events have occurred with immigrant families in Australia. An example of this is a specific account of a Greek family whose daughter complained to social workers of psychological cruelty towards her from her father. The cruelty, allegedly, appeared to be that the father did not allow sufficient social freedom to his daughter, who wanted to access the social life to which she aspired. The daughter was under the age of eighteen years and the father exercised, what he regarded as a cultural value, his parental authority to prevent her from going everywhere she pleased (Smolicz 1979). The intervention of the social workers within the family’s traditional values ignored the ‘pre-existing’ cultural value of family ‘solidarity’. The cause of the attitude of revolt by the daughter was the tendency to self-assertion, which was the accepted cultural value of the mainstream Anglo-Australian group, and rejection of the authority of the father. Thus, in a family whose culture upholds the principle of solidarity, “any interference of external powers”, such as political or social authorities who uphold different family values, has a destructive influence on the immigrant family by undermining “the fundamental principle of the family as a social institution” (Znaniecki 1969, p. 93).

To clarify this, the father needs to be recognised as a member of a family group whose conformity to the traditional values conflicts with the daughter’s assertion of her

personality and rejection of such values, in favour of accepting another group's values of individual freedom. Znaniecki points out that "when the social theory assumes that a certain social [cultural] value is of itself the cause of a certain individual reaction, it is then [important] . . . to know the whole past of the individual [and] of the society" (Znaniecki 1969, p. 86). In this case the social authorities did not understand that the dispute involved the interaction of individual attitudes and group values across two different cultures. Later Australian studies suggest that some modification to the principle of family solidarity, or what Smolicz (1979) and (Secombe & Zajda 1999) called 'collectivist values', may be achieved gradually over one or more generations (Chiro & Smolicz 1997; Smolicz 1983a; Smolicz & Secombe 1986).

A group's culture is characterised by constant change and the causes for these changes are constant interactions between 'values' and 'attitudes'. Conversely, it is important to realise that the maintenance of cultural values is dependent on the personal disposition of individuals who in their attitudes and actions favour continuity not change in the life of the group. Znaniecki emphasizes that both group cultural values and individual experience, thoughts and feelings need to be taken into account in the study of social change (Dulczewski 2000, p. 202). This principle applies also to understanding why the cultural values of a group do not change.

This value-attitude interaction has relevance for understanding the social institution of schools, such as, the one involved in this research. Its curriculum, rules and accepted patterns of organisation have been based over the years on mainstream Anglo-Australian

values. The actions and attitudes of individual students, staff members, principal and executive staff all reflect this one set of cultural values. As a result, the students tend to regard anyone who does not fit the Anglo-Australian pattern of values, whether culturally or visibly, as not 'one of us'. Furthermore, the values of the community around the school, evident in shopping centres, civic areas and suburban homes, reinforces the students' attitudes of indifference to or rejection of the 'cultural other'.

The question underlying this research is whether it is possible to provide students in such a monocultural context with a first hand experience of participation in the life of another culture which is sufficiently positive that it encourages change in students, so that they lean toward understanding and empathy in their attitudes to the 'cultural other'. Can teachers at the classroom level, reflectively and consciously, play a role in introducing students to cultural values from outside the Anglo-Australian mainstream group through their teaching of another language or the study of music written by composers of another cultural background, or works of art from cultures around the world? There are, for example, important literary texts which through their plot, themes and characters highlight the destructive consequences of racism, hatred, injustice or even lack of empathy for the 'cultural other', or portray the 'cultural other' in positive terms. It is the purpose of this research to investigate how far the study of such English texts can provide an experience of cultural values different from those prevailing in the monocultural ethos of the school. Is it possible that, as the students read these texts, the reflective processes of their imaginations can lead them to deeper levels of understanding of the situation of the 'cultural other' and the formation of new positive attitudes toward them? In

answering this question it is important to understand the nature of social groups which is elaborated in the following section.

### 2.3 Systems of Social Values

Relationships, institutions and grouping of people play a major part in humanistic sociological theory, where human beings constitute social values for one another in *group social systems*, such as, academic, business, social, sporting, religious or family structures (Smolicz 1979; Znaniecki 1969). Within the context of the group, individuals are recognised and accepted in so far as they are given the cultural meaning of a legitimate group member; an individual within a social system may become the object of other members' social actions and relationships. According to Smolicz (1979) these group systems become pools of "social stocks or reservoirs" in which individuals interact and from which they draw to construct *personal social systems* of their own.

The distinction between primary and secondary relations can be usefully applied to social systems. Smolicz defines

*primary relationships as those in which contact is personal, informal or intimate, usually face to face, and involving the entire human personality. In contrast, secondary relationships are the more impersonal, formal and restricted associations that are typical of the occupational, political, commercial and military spheres of life* (Secombe & Zajda, 1999, p. 141).

As an example, in school the individual members of staff, students, grounds persons, administrative staff and parents are all social values for one another in the particular system of the school. Relationships between teachers, students, other academic persons and parents are usually more limited and formal, based on a *secondary group system*. On



the other hand, the *primary group system* can be found within a family, a clan, or an exclusive club. For instance, pupils who attend the same private school over a number of years have been shown to develop intimate primary relationships which continue well after graduating from school (White 2004).

It is important to consider how students of minority ethnic backgrounds relate to other students in the context of the school. Ethnic minority students, in a monocultural school situation, often find it more comfortable to assimilate within the existing mainstream Anglo-Australian school culture, than to be seen as different or as the ‘cultural other’. Rather than suffer “social exclusion” or even “social deprivation” such students may speak, act, dress and behave in the same manner as their Australian counterparts. Principally, if the student is white, it is simpler to slip into the dominant culture. Such assimilation is not possible for a student who has coloured skin or wears specific dress because of religious customs. Some of these students may form *primary personal* relationships and be accepted in a *primary group system* of their peers, but often minority ethnic students act as if they are in a *secondary group system* at school. Their ethnic cultural life at home may never be exposed to the students of the majority culture. The table below clearly defines the distinction which Smolicz made between Primary and Secondary Social Systems.

**TABLE 2.2****Classification of Social Systems - By J.J. Smolicz**

<b>Type of System</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>
<b>Personal</b>	Primary Personal (PP)	Secondary Personal (SP)
<b>Group</b>	Primary Group (PG)	Secondary Group (SG)

Secombe & Zajda 1999, p. 143

This classification of social systems provides even more insight when linked with the ideological values of collectivism and individualism. Collectivist values emphasize the interests and needs of the group, be it family, business, school or nation, as more important than the well-being of any individual group member. In contrast, individualist ideological values uphold the rights and freedoms of individuals to pursue their own needs and interests over and above the welfare of the groups to which they belong. According to Smolicz, the Anglo-based cultures of English speaking countries, like Australia, Great Britain and the USA, tend to be individualistic in their ideological orientation at the primary level, particularly in relation to family, but collectivist at the secondary level, as in a sporting team, or musical group, school, or organization, political party or nation state. Other ethnic cultures, such as, Italian, Greek, Polish and Indian in the research studies of Smolicz and his associates, tend to be collectivist at the primary level, especially in family relationships, but individualist at the secondary level, and particularly in politics and national government (Smolicz 1979; Secombe & Zajda 1999).

Examples of this ideological difference at family level have been discussed above. Family values of solidarity or collectivism in Polish and Greek family life have been broken down by the impact of individualistic family values of the Anglo majority groups

in USA and Australia. At the level of the secondary social systems, the contrast between the collectivism shown in Great Britain and the individualism displayed in Greece in response to the introduction of stringent economic reforms was evident following the global financial crises of 2008. Many European nations suddenly discovered that their debt was insurmountable. One of these nations was Greece. In January 2010 George Papandreou, the Prime Minister, announced to the population a 300 billion euro national debt. To overcome this, it became necessary for the government to proclaim severe cuts, increases in taxation and other measures to begin the arduous task of reducing the deficit. Upon this declaration, a group of demonstrators took to the streets of Athens and began a rampage which culminated in the burning of property and the killing of three people. They stamped in bloody events their protests proclaiming their personal rights as individuals over and against the needs of the state and the Greek people as a whole. Their actions can be seen as part of a proud tradition in Greek culture upholding the rights of the individual against the collectivist impositions of the state.

In contrast, the United Kingdom in July 2010, declared an even greater national debt of 927 billion pounds. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, appealed to the general public for support and announced severe public cuts and increases in taxation and other measures in an endeavour to reduce the national debt. In this instance, there were no demonstrations from individuals within the population. Street interviews with members of the public on the evening television media and newspapers revealed that popular reaction to these stringent declarations was to regard them as, primarily, acceptable and necessary. The British people were maintaining their collectivist values by upholding

solidarity with the government and its officials despite the extraordinary economic stringencies being demanded of them. The further riots of August 2011 will be discussed in the next section.

#### **2.4 Identity, In-Group and Out-Group**

Another sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman, writes about the theory of “self” and “groups” which reflect how people respond to each other on an individual and group level. The ‘I’ represents the ability of a person to ‘choose’ and to take ‘responsibility’ for his or her actions. The stronger the ‘I’ the more autonomous is the personality of the individual. The ‘I’ experiences the contradiction between ‘freedom’ and ‘dependence’. There is a certain amount of freedom accessible to an individual, alongside, a certain amount of dependence on others. Bauman states that “Living in a group, I have to control *myself*. The self is something to be controlled, and I am the one to control it” (Bauman 1993, pp. 28-30). This ‘self-identification’ is found in this ‘modern era’ which challenges “living ‘true to kind’ . . . of actively conforming to the established social types . . . of imitating, following the pattern . . . not deviating from the norm” (Bauman 2001, p. 475).

Thus, Bauman also explains ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’ which are formed “from our mutual antagonism. One can say that each side derives its identity from the very fact that we see it as being engaged in antagonism with its opposite.” An ‘in-group’ is one “whose boundaries ought to be defended at any price. Although there may be difficulties within this group, usually a solution is found at the end, even if its members may appear harsh and selfish. However, there is sufficient solidarity to hold the group together. The

perception formed of the 'out-group' may contain "enmity, suspicion and aggressiveness" with hostilities which produce 'prejudice'. Bauman states that this means "a flat refusal to admit any virtues the enemy may possess", whether it be "real or imaginary vices" (Bauman 1993, pp. 46-47).

Bauman's concept of 'in-group' and 'out-group' can be applied on a global scene with, firstly, an explication of this particular scene. The recent extraordinary economic events of riots in Tottenham, North London, 6 August 2011, was sparked by the shooting of a black youth, Mark Duggan, by the Metropolitan Police Services. There were buildings and cars torched, looting, killings and injuries. The results were five deaths, more than sixteen civilian injuries, 186 police injuries and some 3,100 people arrested. The riots spread to Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and other English cities.

Many people in Britain were shocked at such riots and speculations on the causes of the uprisings were many and varied. They appeared to represent a breakdown in the long established British tradition of solidarity with government, pulling together and adapting to restrictions which had seen them through the dark days of two world wars and other economic bad times. Although the rioters were of a mixed background, there was a predominant ethnic minority involvement. Socio-economic factors and youth unemployment, as well as social media, gang culture and criminal opportunism were regarded as contributory factors. It is of note, however, that the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) said that the planned arrest was part of 'Operation Trident' which investigated gun crime within the black community. Professor Gus John

from the University of London has argued that the tactical use of frequent “stop and search”, particularly of young black males, caused resentment of the police in the black community.

Camila Batmanghelidjh wrote in *The Independent* that the “social exclusion” and “social deprivation” were to blame. These young people find it difficult to know where they belong. The old cultural values of their parents become irrelevant in many areas and the new English cultural values are often inaccessible to them. They find it easier, therefore, to create their own culture which gives them identity and solidarity in gangs and often express their frustrations in violence. This, undoubtedly, can be exacerbated by the continual antagonism of certain police members. The *Financial Times*, September 2011 found a strong link between rioting and deprivation. The former Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair wrote in *The Observer* that the riots were not caused by a broken society, but due to a group of young, alienated, disaffected youth who are outside of social mainstream and who live in a culture at odds with any canons of proper behaviour.

The London riots of 2011 can be explained in terms of the creation of youth gangs where identity to the ‘in-group’ is formed through “mutual antagonism” towards the authoritative police who form the ‘out-group’. A vice-versa situation can occur with the police, as an ‘in-group’ system, where prejudice breeds and “iniquitous motives are read into [the offenders], as if according to the principle ‘Whatever you do or say will be taken down and used as evidence against you’” (Bauman 1993, p.47). Here the police’s

‘Operation Trident’ may have provoked a situation that could have been averted with less forceful police handling.

Similarly, the ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’, in a monocultural school situation, can explain why students from ethnic background prefer to assimilate into the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. These ‘in-group’ students find

*Mutual help, protection and friendship are therefore the imaginary rules of the in-group life . . . [the] relationships of the in-group type [are seen] as emotionally warm, suffused with mutual sympathy and thus inspiring in everyone the loyalty and determination needed for the solidary defence of the group against all and sundry” (Bauman 1993, p. 43).*

Thus, an ‘in-group’ student who does not wish to appear different omits to divulge information about his/her personal ethnic life at home. Overall, the feeling of the ethnic student in an ‘in-group’ is one of belonging where “protection” and “friendships” are made. This becomes a practical and better solution than being regarded as an ‘outsider’ whose ‘out-group’ is considered with some suspicion, ignorance and incomprehensibility. According to Bauman, how individuals negotiate their ‘in-group’, ‘out-group’ identity is an example of sociological study “showing apparently familiar things from unexpected angles and thus undetermining all routine and self-confidence” (Bauman 1993, p. 215).

In light of the proposed research question, it is pertinent to push these concepts a little further by asking how the ‘cultural other’ can be conceptualized in terms of humanistic sociology. It would appear that the ‘cultural other’ is one who is given the meaning of not being a member of any recognised group within the social context concerned. Thus a person recognised as not a member of the family is not included in intimate family gatherings. In an Adelaide school context, a newly arrived Afghan girl wearing a head

scarf, or a Sudanese boy is most often given the meaning of “not one of us” by the other students. The basis of this judgement is the visible signs of their difference – the different clothing in the case of the girl and the different skin colour of the boy. At best, they are likely not to be rejected entirely as a member of the legitimate group, from the perspective of its members, but considered not to be a full or proper member; someone who is just on the edges of acceptance and recognition.

## **2.5 Kloskowska’s National Identification and Cultural Valence**

Bauman’s distinction , between ‘in-groups’ and out-groups’, looks at groups which are regarded as incompatible by their members, in that belonging to one group becomes the basis for exclusion from another. In contrast, Antonina Kloskowska, an eminent Polish sociologist, investigated the extent to which individuals choose to participate in the culture of another group, in addition to their own group. This she considered to be an issue of importance in the contemporary world, where no modern nation state is “without roots in some ethnic foundations” (Kloskowska 2001, p. 19).

Kloskowska used two concepts: ‘national identification’ and ‘cultural valency’ to analyse the diaries or autobiographies of key Polish figures and the transcripts of detailed interviews with seventy Polish young people studying at university. She found that national identification, or allegiance to a particular nation-state, fell into a number of categories. ‘Single’ relates to individuals who identify with one nation state, while ‘dual’ applies to those who consider themselves members of two nation states. There is also the possibility of some people feeling ‘uncertain’ of their national identification or preferring



to identify as ‘cosmopolitan’ rather than with a particular nation state (Kloskowska 2001).

‘Cultural valence’, on the other hand, involves not just knowing about a people’s culture, but being competent and able to participate in the culture, as well as having a sense of commitment and sympathy for it. Kloskowska distinguishes four kinds of valence: univalent individuals have competence and commitment in only one culture; bivalent individuals have competence and commitment in two cultures; and polyvalent in three or more. Ambivalent describes those whose participation in two cultures leads to uncertainty and even a sense of inner conflict (Kloskowska 2001).

Most of Kloskowska’s university respondents had a single national identification with Poland, together with valence in a single culture, Polish. However, some from western regions bordering Germany, and on the eastern borderlands with Ukraine and Belarus, gave evidence of being bivalent, or even polyvalent, or in a few cases, ambivalent. For the most part, these bivalents had a single national identification with Poland, although a few claimed a dual national identification (Kloskowska 2001).

The achievement of cultural valence is based on what Kloskowska (2001, p. 98) called *culturalization*, “the initiation and entrance into the universe of symbolic culture,” to which young people are exposed in the course of their education. In the symbolic culture of a national group, Kloskowska includes monuments of architecture, collections of literature, scientific works and other texts in the national language, painting and

sculpture, films and musical scores and recordings (Kloskowska 2001; Znaniecki 1969; Smolicz 2001). This may be interpreted as a rather elitist view, focussed on what is often called the high culture of a group. Kloskowska, herself, was prepared to admit the possibility that more popular culture, such as, detective stories, soap operas, romantic novels, jazz, rock and pop music, could be characteristic of the nation at its broadest base (Kloskowska 2001).

In the Australian context, the high culture of poetry and drama, opera and symphony orchestras, and galleries and exhibitions are usually seen as a manifestation of privilege among a very small elite who are to be cut down as 'tall poppies'. The essence of Australian culture has most often been seen as having a more popular base: film, pop and folk music, sport and outdoor activities – as portrayed at the Sydney Olympics.

Despite this qualification, the recognition that individuals can be bivalent in more than one culture is particularly appropriate for understanding many individuals in Australian society. One such example would be a young man from Italian parents in Australia. He participates in Italian culture at home and in Italian community circles, while participating in Anglo-Australian culture at school and university in sporting clubs and professional life. On the one hand, he speaks Italian, upholds family solidarity and maintains his Catholic faith. Moreover, he plays cricket and Australian Rules Football, socialises with Anglo-Australian friends and even goes on holiday with them. He is bivalent at the level of cultural activation and personal commitment, but has only one

national identification, Australian. Hudson (1995) found a number of such examples in her research on university graduates of ethnic minority.

In relation to the proposed study, it is also useful to consider where the majority of Australians would be placed in Kloskowska's categorization. Those born in Australia to Australian born parents are most likely to have a single national identification as Australian and be univalent in mainstream Anglo-Australian culture, because they have had no opportunity to participate in another people's culture. The Anglo- Australian respondents of Hudson (1995) all followed this pattern.

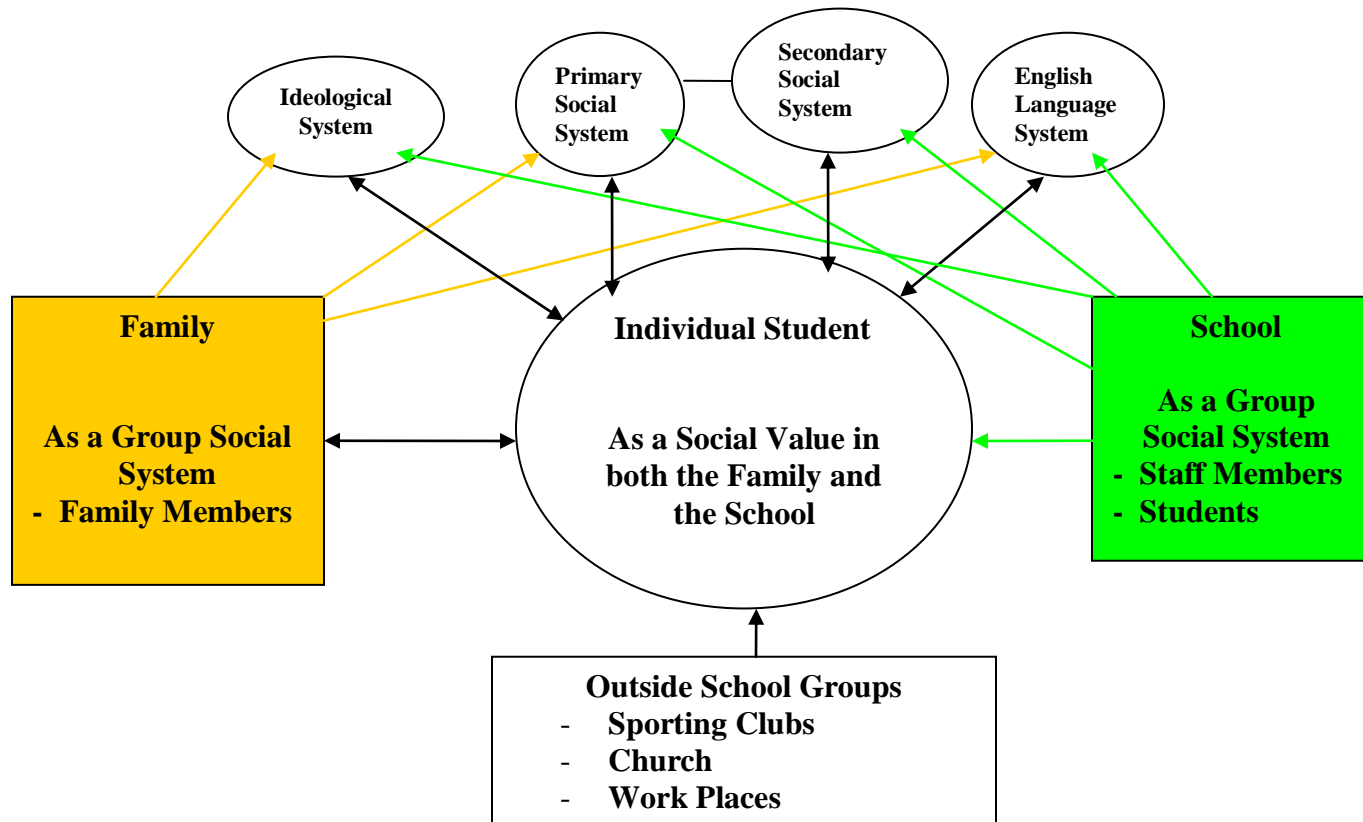
In her study of education graduates of Anglo-Australian background, Secombe (1997) found four respondents who could be classified as bivalent, as a result of extensive studies in music or a language. She also identified a number of respondents as "incipient bivalents", because their life experiences of friendship and travel had made them strongly positive in attitude to other cultures. Although they lacked the knowledge and experience to actively participate in the culture of another group, they could be regarded as open to the possibility of such participation. Nevertheless, two-thirds of these respondents could be identified as having a single national identification with Australia and being univalent in mainstream Anglo-Australian culture.

These studies of the attitudes of mainstream university students and graduates do not appear to have been replicated by any in-depth investigation of the attitudes of mainstream Anglo-Australian secondary students to those of other cultural backgrounds.

It seemed useful therefore to try to outline in diagrammatic form the Personal and Group Cultural Systems of the students at the Independent School, before the research began, as far as these could be projected.

**STUDENT'S PERSONAL AND GROUP CULTURAL SYSTEMS PRIOR TO RESEARCH**

**DIAGRAM 2.1**



## 2.6 Student's Personal and Group Cultural Systems Prior to Research

The diagram above is a summation of the social and cultural context of an individual student prior to this research. The student is placed centrally within the diagram to indicate the importance of the student's position, not only in the conceptual framework, but also within this research. This student is considered as a social value in the two most important groups: the family and the school systems. Within both of these two systems there exists a particular culture to which the student is exposed. Znaniecki emphasises the individual; and the individual, such as the student, is dependent upon the social groups and their culture, the family, school, and other group organisations, such as sporting clubs, church and work places for the development of his or her own personal cultural systems. Through participation in the life of these groups, the individual learns their cultural values and can begin to use them in his or her own way.

It can be seen that the black double-headed arrow between the family and the individual student indicates the personal primary family relationship. Through interaction with the various family members and participation with family cultural values, individuals develop their personal cultural systems, as shown by gold arrows. A gold arrow points from the gold 'family' square to the *Primary Social System* circle to show that relationships between the family members are "personal, informal or intimate" (Secombe & Zajda 1999). The student's interactive personal relationship within the family, as a *Primary Social System*, is a "face to face" involvement of the whole personality.

The green square, representing the school as a group social system, shows a green arrow pointing toward the large central circle for the individual student as well as to each of the individual four personal cultural systems. The school's social system, in its full context, contains individual members of staff and all the students. Within this system, each student appropriates certain values and invariably forms particular attitudes. According to Smolicz (1979; Secombe & Zajda 1999), the relationship that the student forms with the staff members at school is usually within a *secondary social system* which is more formal and impersonal. However, some of the relationships that the student may develop with other students at the school are within a *primary social system* which is personal and informal. This is shown with a green arrow that points from the school to the *primary* and *secondary social system* circles.

Another arrow from the family gold square points to the English Language System. The family's communicative abilities are founded in the English language which is, primarily, the only language spoken by the student. The student communicates with the family in the monolingualistic culture, of English. This is indicative of the school where interaction between staff members and other students is also in English. Within this school culture the student values the English language above other languages (Berthold 1992). The students in the classroom learn that words and literary forms have specific cultural values. As the meanings of these are perceived within their minds, their personal cultural value systems in English begin to develop and extend beyond their use in home communication.

In the rectangular box below the Individual Student circle, there is a list of groups outside the school environment. Within these groups there is a stronger possibility for the student to come into contact with persons from other cultures. A sporting club or work place may expose the student to a fellow sportsperson or work colleague who speaks a different language and whose behaviour is quite different to that of the student's family or school social groups. However, if within these social groups the predominant culture is Anglo-Australian, it is highly likely that any person from a different culture has assimilated. The student from the majority culture will feel confident and self-assured that there are others within a social group who are like-minded and each shares, as Bauman (1993) suggests, a sense of 'freedom' and 'dependence' on others within the group. Bauman's 'in-groups and 'out-groups' may also apply within a school context, or outside, where, according to Smolicz, students may form *primary personal* (informal) or *secondary personal* (formal) relationships among each other, as indicated by the gold arrows.

Within the Ideological System circle, there is a representation of the individual student's sense of cultural identity. For the majority, their identification is with Australia. This is mostly derived from ideology of the family and it is shown with a gold arrow pointing toward to Ideological System circle. Australia's European roots were founded in the Anglo-Celtic culture from which the majority culture of contemporary Anglo-Australians has arisen. A student identifies with this particular culture which is reinforced within the Family group system, as well as the School group system. Therefore, the ideological system, with which the student from the majority culture identifies, gives a particular meaning to the 'cultural other' as someone whose skin colour, style of dress, religious



practices, use of language or patterns of family life do not fit the cultural model of people in the Anglo-Australian majority group. Such a group of students are the participants in this research,, where educational theory is applied within the English classroom. The in-depth reading of literary texts attempt to create a ‘transactional experience’ with the readers, to see whether understanding and meaning of language could form the basis of positive ideas in their imagination.

## **2.7 Rosenblatt on Aesthetic Reading and Students’ Transactional Experience of the Literary Text**

Louise M. Rosenblatt was both an educationist and linguist in her approach to the teaching of the English language. She was concerned with how deeply a student transacts with a prescribed literary text and how the teacher facilitates this experience within a classroom. The relationship between the students and the texts, including how meanings are derived from such texts, was comprehensively explicated in Rosenblatt’s *aesthetic reading* and *transactional experience* theory. In the actual reading event

*The reader, we can say, interprets the text. (The reader acts on the text). Or we can say, the text produces a response in the reader. (The text acts on the reader) . . . The relation between reader and text is not linear. It is a situation, an event at a particular time and place in which each element conditions the other (Rosenblatt 1978, p. 16).*

As readers, the students arrive at the text “according to already acquired habits, assumptions and expectations [that] becomes the environment to which it also responds” (Rosenblatt 1978, p. 17). In this regard the student’s existing culture and “past experience” affects the interpretation of literary texts. The students’ anxieties, interests, expectations and many other factors are all psychological responses by the student to the

stimulus of the text. The student as a reader responds to the words or symbols and the efferent (Latin, 'to carry away') result of the experience of what happens during the actual reading event is the *transactional* process. "Sensing, feeling, imagining, thinking under the stimulus of the words, the reader adopts the aesthetic attitude . . . the complex structure of experience" evoked by the text (Rosenblatt 1978, p. 26). This *aesthetic reading*, or "lived through experience" depends "on the nature, state of mind, or past experience of the reader" (Rosenblatt 1978, p. 27). As a result of participation within a work of literature; a poem, novel, play, et cetera, a reader ultimately selects, synthesises and interprets with the power of the imagination. With the 'deconstruction' of the text in literary criticism, that is, "the study, discussion, evaluation, and interpretation of literature" (*New World Encyclopedia*, 2011), the student's understanding deepens so that "the final synthesis or organisation is achieved" (Rosenblatt 1978, p. 54).

By careful selection of texts, the students can enrich their ideas, understandings and attitudes toward the focus of this research, the 'cultural other'. According to Rosenblatt, the meanings of the *aesthetic reading* that the students have attained in their journey, through the *transactional experiences* of literary texts, ultimately influence their deeper understanding of the author's themes, their imagination and finally their attitudes to life. It is the involvement and intimate experience of the student with the author's text, within a classroom situation, that leads the way for constructive change toward the 'cultural other'.

## 2.8 Literature, Imagination and the Inner Life

In the students' lives the image of the 'other' comes in many different ways as a person who has a disability, or whose mind processes are not regarded as normal; a person whose behaviour is different than others; a person whose skin colour is darker than white; a person who speaks with an accent; a person whose facial appearance is different, such as an Asian. The forms of these images are numerous. The significant question is, of course, how do students react and understand these images? In the text *Reimagining Education: Essays on Reviving the Soul of Learning*, edited by Dennis Patrick Slattery and Jennifer Leigh Selig (2008), the emphasis on the heart of learning, on the soul and psyche affected by the understanding of imagery become the essence of the various essays within this text. One of the contributors is Elizabeth Fergus-Jean who is a visual artist and educator. Her essay 'Till We Have Faces: Image as Psyche' discloses the importance of fostering the individual soul within each student through appealing to their personal perception of interpretive images.

Fergus-Jean's quotation from C.S. Lewis, in her title, encapsulates the essence of students' perception of an image and the personal individualistic interpretation of it. Lewis wrote, "Till that word (which has lain at the centre of one's soul for years) can be dug out of us, why should they (the gods) hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?" (Fergus-Jean 2008, p. 12). What needs to be "dug out" is the real self of a person. Educators need to realise the uniqueness of the individual's perception of the image in the mind. Fergus-Jean reiterated the importance of a "deep perspectival awareness . . . of the ways in which they [the students]

perceive others, and the images that are manifested in culture. Therefore, even when we share the same cultural background and perhaps even the same ancestral lineage, our personal lens is always unique to ourselves” (Fergus-Jean 2009, p. 132). How each student’s perception of the ‘cultural other’ will be acknowledged and understood according to each student’s life journey depends on individual perception of the ‘cultural other’. In this investigation, how clearly the personalised datum of each student is written or articulated varies in discernment, depth and sensitivity in responding to people of different cultures in both the school environment, home and immediate environs.

Understanding the ‘cultural other’ requires the development of a conscience or what Kristina Love calls, “moral subjectivities,” over a period of time. Her article reveals that, whether it is the talk or written work around the literary text, the significant semantics are similar. Love supports her paper by citing others who said, “It is commonly agreed among historians of English teaching (Applebee, 1990; Christie, 1990; Eagleton, 1996; Hunter, 1988) that from its inception as an academic subject, English has always been concerned with questions of social justice and morality” (Love 2001, p. 214). Love demonstrates that “moral authority is not exclusively invested in the text, but in the negotiation between it and readers, who bring their own moral ‘codes’ to the interpretive processes” (Love 2001, p. 215).

This research is concerned with students’ interpretive moral codes as revealed in their writings towards the ‘cultural other’. How ‘moral subjectivities’ are formed in the absence of any interactive experience with minority ethnic groups; the ‘marginalised

other' where appropriate and how the students hermeneutically process English literary texts, through reading and studying in classrooms; these are, in essence, the heart of this research.

Of course, students acquire moral understanding through other means. One of the obvious means is through family environment and "making sense of the world . . . by what is observable in the outside world and of the inner world of consciousness." Experience is an important aspect of the moral consciousness in a student's mind where "representing and reflecting on such experiences aid in making sense of the world" (Love 2001, p. 218). However, what happens if there is an absence of these experiences? It may produce negativity of attitudes towards certain groups of ethnic background which can be due to ignorance, lack of knowledge or understanding of specific minority groups, negative comments in the media or, indeed, from family members. Whether the students are able to formulate positive attitudes with "moral subjectivities" towards the 'cultural other' may depend on how well the English literary texts influence their imagination as *intrapsychological* processes take place, which Vygotsky ascribes to the students' 'higher mental development'.

The use of the mind in responding to imagery is part of 'higher mental development' and the transference of that image to the heart creates the emotive human bond between the two. In Peter Willis' article, the evocative representation of image binds both the intellect and the instinctive response from the emotive heart to create, what Willis calls, "mood". He explains it as "the human power of image making and its links to the so-

called ‘knowing of the heart,’ the knowing linked to a person’s sense of her or himself and her or his position in the world” (Willis 2008, p. 247). Although, it would be difficult for adolescent students to grasp this concept, they do unknowingly practice it. The “sense” of one’s self, which is often dynamic and at times capricious, influences the response to other things and people. When an individual processes things in the mind by “providing a name” for them, it is important to recognise that “the meaning of things is not inherent in objects, but is actually located in the individual’s inner life” (Davis, 1991, p. 5).

To understand and make meaning of their “inner life” students need to comprehend the meanings of the literary text and then process them in the mind to find a place in the heart which creates the mood. According to Heidegger (1962), this “mood-like disclosure of things . . . is thus always involved when we understand another’s experience or when we read the text of a human situation – we relate ourselves to its mood – and thus understand with our hearts” (Willis 2008, p. 256). Put in another way, the emotional condition of the heart is an intimate state of the gathered “significance of things in immediate, bodily-felt ways” (L. Todres et al. 2006, p. 5). How far the emotive element and intellectual mind are integral to understanding the holistic students’ responses with integrity and reality can only be revealed in the student’s responses to his or her “inner life”. The question is whether such an experience of English literature is sufficient to enable the students to overcome their pre-existing attitudes to the ‘cultural other’ and formulate new and positive attitudes.

In the application of these concepts to the four year level studies, the key element is the human factor of the imagination in a pedagogical setting where the educator's role toward the students and the students' experience with the literary text become crucial issues for this research. To illuminate the process of how new insights arise from imaginative response to texts, Vygotsky's understandings of cognitive processes are used.

## **2.9 Vygotsky's Psychology as an Explication of Cognitive Processes**

Lev Vygotsky's concepts in educational psychology explicate an individual's thinking processes and personality within his/her cultural context. In his approach to learning and understanding Vygotsky speaks of a 'doubling' of experience (van der Veer 2007, pp. 44-45; van der Veer & Valsiner 1991). Human beings are able to gather experiences in their collective past as "historical experience" and "social experience". These refer to dimensions of time and distance which human beings can overcome in order to learn from experiences gathered elsewhere. Thus, in the same manner, students gather their own 'historical' and "social experience" in the course of their life which they use to bring meaning to the texts that they read, study and analyse in the classroom. The elucidation of a novel, play, poem or short story is partly affected by the specific historic and or "social experience" of the students, which they bring understanding to the text formulating personal attitudes that influence their actions in life.

Vygotsky's concept of *mediation* provides understanding of how culture enters into developmental psychological processes. Mediation is an activity that is productive of 'higher mental processes' and is a socially meaningful activity. Originating in the social

plane, in higher level processes, mediation becomes an intrapsychologic phenomenon. Vygotsky, was interested in how “semiotic mediators, from simple signs to complex semiotic systems such as works of literature, act as ‘psychological tools’ in transforming natural impulse into higher mental processes” (Kozulin 1990, p. 114; Daniels 2003). In this thesis, selected literary texts are used as *semiotic mediators* in the classroom to investigate whether they foster inclusive attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’.

Vygotsky saw analogous behaviour in apes and that of human infants where instrumental behaviour is mediated by a material tool in the former and both material and psychological tools in the latter. In the symbolic act a psychological tool mediates man’s own psychological processes in which

*The most essential feature distinguishing the psychological tool from the technical tool, is that it directs the mind and behaviour whereas the technical tool . . . is directed towards producing one or another set of changes in the object itself. Vygotsky indicated that the psychological aspect of material instrumental activity and symbolic mediatory activity are intertwined. The mastery of nature and the mastery of behaviour are mutually related [because] in the course of man’s transformation of nature, his own nature changes as well” (Kozulin 1990, p. 115).*

Vygotsky’s quotation, translated above, asserts the interconnectivity of the psychological aspect of material instrumental activity and symbolic mediatory activity. A child’s cultural development is expressed twice: “First it appears between people as an *interpsychological* category, and then within a child as an *intrapsychological* category” (Kozulin 1990, p. 115; Daniels 2003). As an example: a student in the classroom observes and listens to a teacher who may be reading and interacting with a poem; the teacher emphasises important metaphoric words which create an “interpsychological



category” for the student. Once the complete image in the mind is processed as an “intrapsychological category,” the student is able to understand the thematic meanings of the poem on a ‘higher mental’ level. In the intrapsychological stage the student may understand meanings from the poetic text and form positive attitudes about the ‘cultural other’ or ‘marginalised other’ in his/her cultural environment.

Vygotsky strongly believed that ‘cultural tools’, of which language was primary, were within reach of most people even as minority groups who may have visible defects: blind, deaf-mute or mentally impaired children. The manner in which humanity influences itself through speech, objective signs and consciousness in speech is central to Vygotsky’s ‘cultural historical’ theory and higher psychological concepts. Vygotsky’s viewpoint was that “if we find differences in cognitive functioning between different ethnic groups these differences should be attributed to cultural factors” (van der Veer 2007, p. 57).

There is no doubt to Vygotsky that people are born with certain innate abilities which genetically determine their potential for mental development, but these also depend on the ‘cultural tools’ offered to the child in the course of his/her process of maturation. During the direction and guidance of a child, “a certain cultural method of controlling oneself from outside is converted into a new intrapsychological layer and gives rise to a new psychological system incomparably higher in composition and cultural-psychological in genesis” (Vygotsky 1999, p. 55). To Vygotsky the organisation of the mind and brain is ultimately dependent upon “age, personal experience, training, and the

acquisition of ‘cultural tools’ such as language. Mind and brain are crucially influenced by culture” (van der Veer 2007, p. 73).

Vygotsky saw the emergence of *scientific concepts* as key in the process of schooling and the intellectual functioning of a person. Such concepts arise within the “highly structured activity of classroom instruction . . . and logical organization” of a specialised subject (Kozulin 1990, p. 168). In contrast, *spontaneous concepts* or ‘everyday concepts’ are those acquired by a child informally at home, through other children and outside of the formal school context (van der Veer & Valsiner 1991). Vygotsky argued “that scientific concepts develop more rapidly, outpacing everyday concepts” (Kozulin 1990, p. 168); and that, as a result, students’ “learning is made conscious” (Newman & Holzman 1993, p. 61).

A student brings to the classroom *spontaneous* ideas that he/she has gleaned; in contrast the classroom activity offers *scientific concepts* through explicit learning. The classroom context, thus, provides an interrelation of these two conceptual realms. The *scientific* concepts ‘lift up’ the students’ *spontaneous* understanding to the more formalised rigour of the *scientific concept*. Students reading a novel about the theme of injustice in a courtroom may have experienced injustice themselves, on a small scale, in the home or sporting club. They are able to relate their idea of justice based on that ‘everyday’ experience to the logical and deconstructed meanings from the text, which stimulate their minds for ‘higher mental learning’. As a result, they develop the *scientific concept* about justice being the right of every individual. In relation to the topic of this research, it

seemed important to investigate how far the students' *spontaneous* learning had created a racist attitude toward the 'cultural other' and whether the *scientific* learning in a formal classroom of a "system of knowledge" could alter the racist attitude to one of empathy and understanding. Could the literature be taught in a "systematic" way to supplement the students' absence of actual experience with the 'cultural other' and evoke, primarily, positive attitudes through attaining higher psychological processes?

One of Vygotsky's concepts most utilised as a teaching tool is the *zone of proximal development*. Here Vygotsky argued that if assistance to a child from a more capable person occurs, the child gains in intellectual potential through his/her ability to grasp and imitate the actions that are within his/her reach. Vygotsky defined the "zone of proximal development of the child as the distance between the level of his actual development, established with the help of problems independently solved, and the level of the child's possible development, established with the help of problems solved by the child under guidance" (van der Veer 2007, p. 81).

For Vygotsky cognitive development depends on the child's maturation and instruction. Within a classroom situation of twenty students or more, there is variable maturity among the pupils. Each student brings to the classroom *spontaneous concepts* or 'everyday concepts' acquired at home and elsewhere. The specific learning encountered in a classroom elevates these concepts to the more inclusive and richer level of the *scientific concept*.

Vygotsky claimed that the main products of school instruction are reflection (*osoznanie*) and mastery (*ovladienie*). He posited that what takes place in becoming literate is a more general phenomenon in school learning. Instruction influences changes in cognition which may never have occurred without it and imbues the child with reasoning which, when mastered, can spread to other domains of thinking within the child's mind. The teacher in the classroom acts as the 'proximal' person. For instance, consider the following: the teacher instructs the students how to identify the director's cinematic technique of Mise-en-scene, which refers to all the visual elements within the frame where the action tells the story and very few cuts are made. Often there is, in the frame, a symbolic message which evokes the viewers' emotional and intellectual responses. Here the student uses 'reflection' on what has been learned and the 'mastery' of this learning enables the student to write about this new cinematic technique with confidence. This, in turn, stimulates the imagination for deeper understanding and interpretation of the literary text; in this case, the film.

## **2.10 Vygotsky's Creativity and the Imagination**

In writing on the development of imagination in childhood, Vygotsky explicated the transformation which occurs when "an image that did not previously exist, emerges" from new impressions in the mind (Vygotsky 1987, p. 339). He places emphasis on the development of speech as instrumental for the impetus of imagination. To this he adds

*the formation of concepts that signals the onset of the transitional age [is] an extremely important factor in the development of the most varied and complex combinations, unifications and connections that can be established between the elements of experience* (Vygotsky 1987, p. 346).

Some of these concepts are formed within a student's mind in a classroom context where the study of literary texts, in all their 'varied and complex combinations', act as a stimulus in the formation of an imaginary experience. The importance of speech to the imagination is also linked to the "development of the child's social interaction with those around him, to the basic forms of the collective social activity of the child's consciousness" (Vygotsky 1987, p. 346). The transformation of these processes of social interaction, cultural tools and signs enables a person to liberate him or herself to become a human being of many other possibilities: complete high school, university, write a novel, create poetry, research scientific probabilities and inspire others through instruction. All of this requires imagination and creativity for the fulfilment of a personal and cultural development.

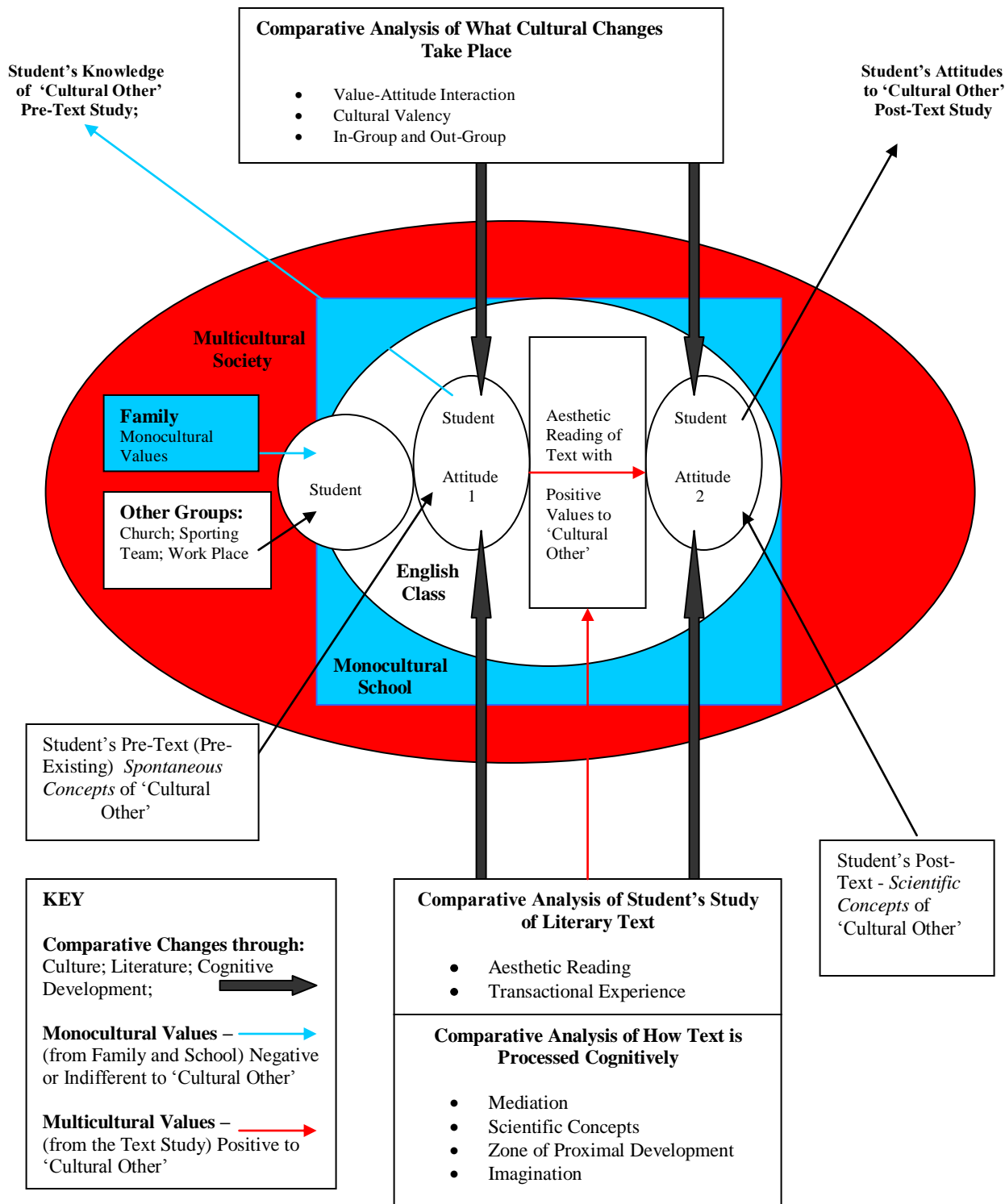
The act of imagination has a rich emotional aspect and is intricately linked to thinking. Some psychologists have argued that the "primal nature of imagination . . . was affect" (Vygotsky 1987, p. 347). In English for example, texts for study should be chosen with the intention of fostering affect in the student and so stimulate the imaginative processes. The development of attitudes created in the mind may be seen as the result of processes imagination within the mind. Psychologically conducted images which are internalized and processed, imprint upon a personality their marks of understanding and knowledge through the concept of transformation. In this research, the question is whether literary texts taught to secondary school students may act as stimuli for the imagination within the particular culture of an English classroom. Are students able to process concepts of people and other cultures by holding "an idea long enough to shape its power' based on

a world view, to make judgments that place an idea in proper relation to others”? (Moran & John-Steiner 2010, p. 13). This would be occurring within their imagination in lieu of actual personal experience with the ‘cultural other’ which the students lacked.

Raised to this level, imagination encourages the students to become contributors within the cultural environment to which they belong. Through the “extraordinary kinship that exists between thinking and imagination” (Vygotsky 1987, p. 348) they are able to differentiate aspects of personality, behaviour and culture in their interrelations with others. The next section discusses a conceptual framework (Diagram 2.2) for understanding how the study of literary texts can stimulate the imagination and evoke cognitive processes, which lead to changes in the students’ attitudes to the ‘cultural other’.

DIAGRAM 2.2

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' COGNITIVE PROCESSING OF THE STUDY OF LITERARY TEXTS AND RESULTING CHANGES IN ATTITUDES TO 'CULTURAL OTHER'**



## 2.11 Conceptual Framework for the Research

Diagram 2.2 represents a conceptual framework for investigating students' cognitive processing of the study of literary texts and resulting changes in attitudes to the 'cultural other'. The large red oval represents Australia's multicultural society. The various ethnic groups in Australia bring their own culture to the culture of the whole nation. Represented by the blue square is the monocultural school which also includes some students of ethnic background who often prefer to assimilate, in the school context, rather than be seen to live a 'bivalent' life of two cultures. To identify and seek acceptance with the 'in-group' of the majority Anglo-Australian culture may be considered desirable if the alternative is to appear as an outsider from the 'out-group' of other minority ethnic students.

Within this diverse country exist, also, monocultural environments or contexts, exemplified by some schools. The heart of a school is the classroom and in this instance, specifically, the English class is indicated by the large white oval. To the left of this oval is a circle labelled as 'student' which represents a student participating within a classroom of a monocultural school, yet living in an overarching multicultural country. This 'student', primarily, comes from a family with monocultural 'values' which influence and 'interact' to form the student's 'attitudes', toward the 'cultural other'. Many students also attend other groups, such as, church, sporting teams and work places, which maybe based on a monocultural or a multicultural environment. Therefore, the student's exposure to people and values, from other cultures, maybe minimal so that monocultural values continue to predominate in his/her experiences. Some, however, may have been exposed to other cultural values.



The 'pre-text study' attitudes of a student within the English classroom are shown by the white oval as 'Student Attitude 1' representing the 'pre-existing' attitudes, based on what Vygotsky calls 'spontaneous concepts' that are attained from home or other 'every-day' areas of the student's life. This is explained in the box on the bottom left hand side of the diagram. The blue arrow is commensurate with monocultural values to which the student would have been exposed in home, school and other contexts. The block arrows coming down and up into the oval labelled as 'Student Attitude 1' shows that the student's pre-text statements are to be compared in culture, literature and cognitive processes with the student's written statements collected post-text study. (See above).

Crossing the centre of the large white oval, representing the 'English Class', is a long rectangle; this indicates the in-depth study of a literary text by the teacher and student as the 'zone of proximal development' which aids the student to perform an 'aesthetic reading' of the text. The formal discussions of the words of the literary text, as 'semiotic mediators', lead to words of the 'scientific concepts' which are an integral part of 'higher mental learning'. This process may become a 'transactional experience' between student-reader and text, in the 'imagination'. This is explained by the two combined rectangles at the bottom of the diagram with a red arrow directly pointing upwards to the English class in which the student is exposed to a text with 'positive values' toward the 'cultural other'. The red arrow across the long rectangle is also indicative of the multicultural values elucidating positivity toward the 'cultural other'.

To the right of the rectangle a second oval shape, labelled Attitude 2, represents the student's attitude, modified by new values to which the student has been exposed by the

study of the literary text. It signifies the extent of the appropriation of these positive attitudes by the student. The interpretation of the student's post-text study statements are compared to the pre-text written statements through cultural, educational and cognitive theories. This is shown by the block arrows going up toward the ovals labelled 'Student Attitude 1' and 'Student Attitude 2' as a comparative pre- and post-text literary analysis of the attitudes of the student. The black arrow pointing outward indicates the possibility that these changed attitudes, primarily formed in the imagination, may eventually be activated within the society at large.

The next chapter explains the method of collecting the data to which the above Conceptual Framework was applied.

## **Chapter Three: Investigating Changes in Understanding and Attitudes Toward the ‘Cultural Other’**

To investigate how far secondary school students’ attitudes to and understanding of the ‘cultural other’ can be changed through the study of literary texts, a method was chosen which enabled students’ thoughts and attitudes to be expressed and analysed for change. An approach based on the humanistic sociological method of individual memoirs and personal statements was adopted as most suitable for the analysis outlined in Diagram 2.2. It allowed the identification of the sociological concepts of values and attitudes in cultural life; Rosenblatt’s educational theory could provide insights into the ways a student in an English classroom interacts with a literary text; and Vygotsky’s socio-historical theory could be used to analyse the cognitive processes which are at the heart of transformation in students’ attitudes. The method of students writing their personal statements before and after the study of literary texts, however, was modified to suit the circumstances of classroom based research and the abilities and learning experiences of the students involved. First, a look at the research design, then follows description of the methodological approaches demarcated by their theoretical position and finally a discussion along the lines of data analysis.

### **3.1 The Research Design**

As the students had minimal or no interaction with the ‘cultural other’, the teacher/researcher chose to investigate how far texts about the ‘cultural other’ used within the English curriculum had any influence upon their attitudes to those who were culturally different. This approach had the double effect of addressing the curriculum and the research at the same time. Suitable texts were chosen for four small scale studies.

The Year Nine texts dealt primarily with Aboriginal Australians as the 'cultural other' in the visual text *Rabbit Proof Fence* and a text of poems, letters and memoirs in *Urgent*. At the Year Ten level, the 'cultural other' was identified in a short story named *Identity*. Within this text, the theme dealt with the immigration of an Italian family to Australia and the assimilation of their son into the majority Anglo-Australian culture. In Year Eleven the students studied the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* which is written from the point of view of a German soldier during World War One. This study was complemented with the poems of the British World War One soldier, Wilfred Owen. All of the above texts were chosen to reveal to the students what it meant to be a person from a different culture living under difficult circumstances as the 'cultural other' or 'marginalised other'.

Contrastingly, for the Year Twelve Study, individual students chose the texts that had the most influence upon their understanding of the 'cultural other'. The students' selected texts varied. One of the novels was *Snow Falling on Cedars* which dealt with the injustices toward the Japanese Americans during World War Two. Another novel was *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* where the 'cultural other', as the outsider, could be regarded more specifically as 'marginalised' through being treated with malice and disempowered by bureaucratic authority. Quite differently, the text, *Pride and Prejudice*, offered the students the experience of class distinctions and the prejudices that are associated with that type of society. Those texts above and many more chosen by the students are discussed in detail in the relevant chapters of the data analysis that follow.

The research was based on classroom teaching over a four year period. In each year level, Nine to Twelve, the chosen texts by the teacher were introduced to the students. For Years Nine and Ten studies, the students were asked to write their thoughts and feelings regarding the theme of the 'cultural other', before the commencement of the study of the text, to specific questions given by the teacher/researcher. Then after an in-depth reading and study of the texts and upon completion of such, the students were asked a series of different questions. They responded by writing their thoughts and sentiments about the characters and situations in the text studied. No homework, for the research questions, was ever set for the students to finish; all work was conducted and completed within the classroom environment in the teacher/researcher's presence.

The Year Eleven study was somewhat different in research design. Instead of asking for the students' thoughts and feelings about the texts for that year level, there was a procedural reversal, in that, the teacher/researcher wrote her own memoir concerning the students' attitudes toward certain themes and related to the 'cultural other' of the two texts studied in Year Eleven. The teacher/researcher's point of view about the students' understanding of the texts and the influence they had upon them was important to be noted as a different perspective about the changes in student attitudes and understanding toward the 'cultural other'.

With the teacher/researcher's presence in the classroom, it was important to note that the writings of the students were, indeed, their very own and not tampered with by anyone else. This was another reason why homework was never given to the students in regard

to the research questions. One more advantage in having the students express their thoughts and feelings during lesson time was that this made it easier to catch the spontaneity of their responses to the studied texts. The teacher/researcher's ability to also answer any queries from the students, with regard to the questions of the research, was a practical advantage for both sides. Upon answering the questions, the students were able to hand up their completed work without any papers going astray.

Not all was advantageous for research in the classroom context. Some of the disadvantages were that certain students' absences from the classroom meant that they missed the session in answering the questions and it was not always possible to give those particular students the time to complete their writings and thoughts later on. From the teacher/researcher's perspective, at times, it was difficult to be totally objective about the students' writings. After all, over a four year period, the students became quite well known to the teacher/researcher and the demarcation between the students' writings, their personalities and the teacher/researcher's analysis of their feelings and thoughts was, sometimes, difficult to separate. However, this was achieved in the interests of the research.

Therefore, consistent with Znaniecki's chapter, *The Principles of Selection of Cultural Data* (Znaniecki 1969), the present research was based on data drawn from sources, such as, personal experiences and observations of the participant students' written statements to questions asked by the teacher/researcher, which formed the primary sources and personal accounts of the data. The students' monocultural experiences and surroundings

were challenged by the thought-provoking literary texts that were analysed and thoroughly studied in a formal classroom of English learning.

### **3.2 Personal Statements as Research Data**

In order to understand individuals as social and cultural beings, Znaniecki developed a method of using personal documents, such as, letters, memoirs, diaries and written statements. From such writings it was possible to identify the attitudes of the individual writers and even the group values from which they were derived. Underpinning this method was the principle that the

*very existence of culture ultimately depends on conscious and active human individuals. Cultural data are the common data of successive experiences of many individuals; they grow in the course of time as agglomerated products of individual agents and are being used in the course of time by numerous individual agents (Znaniecki 1969, pp. 296-297; Dulczewski, 2000).*

This has important consequences for researchers. Any data they collect are always “‘somebody’s’ never ‘nobody’s’ data. . . such data, as objects of the student’s [that is, researcher’s] theoretic reflection, already belong to somebody else’s active experience and are such as this active experience makes them” (Znaniecki 1969, p. 137). This means that the individuals who provide memoirs or personal statements are to be regarded as active participants with individual points of view on themselves and the social and cultural contexts to which they are inextricably connected (Znaniecki in Smolicz & Secombe 2000, p. 270). These personal data originate in the consciousness of the individuals; their cognitive processes of mind, experiences in life and attitudes toward others are revealed in their writings.

Researchers become privy to this unique life in each individual writer's "portion of the world," in so far as they are prepared to view it from the writer's perspective. Znaniecki called this attitude of the researcher toward the data, the *humanistic coefficient*. Robert Bierstedt in his introduction to a selection of Znaniecki's writings explained the importance of the *humanistic coefficient*.

*The stars, it is said, have no sentiments, the atoms no anxieties that have to be taken into account. But sentiments and anxieties are intimately involved in the actions of human beings, and these actions require therefore for their understanding some comprehension of the humanistic coefficient* (Znaniecki 1969, p.34).

In his own research studies, Znaniecki used a variety of personal documents. The original investigation with W. I. Thomas into the life of Polish peasants in Europe and America analysed memoirs and letters written by the immigrants to their families in Poland. Thomas and Znaniecki considered a *memoir* as the most useful personal document in which an individual's lifetime experiences and participation in "social life" are expressed in written form as a reflection on events from the past (Blumer 1939; Znaniecki 1969). Later as Professor of Sociology in the University of Poznan, he used statements written by individuals who lived in the city to understand what the city of Poznan meant in the consciousness of its inhabitants. Subsequently, Znaniecki and his students organised a competition which asked peasants who owned small holdings in rural areas in Poland to write memoirs about their lives (Znaniecki, 1969).

Znaniecki, while in Urbana, Illinois, had his American students to interview and collect data from the faculty and administration on the basis of which he wrote *The Social Role of the University Student*. This became "the first such study to also include teacher-



student-generational ‘trajectories’ from start to finish of their shared college career” (Grathoff 2000, p. 16).

In Australia, Smolicz adopted the method of memoirs written by immigrants and their children to study their adaptation to life in Australian society and the extent of the maintenance of their home languages and cultures (Smolicz & Secombe 1981; 1986; 1989). A number of his students used the method with different groups of respondents (Chiro & Smolicz 1997). Others began to make use of a more limited version of the method by asking respondents to write about their experiences in particular areas of life, rather than across a lifetime span (Maniam 2011; Smolicz & Secombe 1981; 1986; 1989; White 2004). Some focused on language use and learning at home and school (Chiro 1998; Smolicz & Secombe 1981; 1986; 1989). Others (Smolicz, Hudson & Secombe 1998) asked participants to discuss family life and friendship patterns. Two of the studies focussed on students’ experiences at secondary school. White (2004), asked students at a boarding college to explain what life at school meant to them. Most recently, Maniam (2011) had Year Eleven students from Adelaide secondary schools write personal statements about their experiences and feelings on playing sport.

This present study adopted a unique approach to this personal document method by incorporating it into the normal pattern of classroom teaching in lessons taught by the teacher/researcher. In relation to the various English texts being studied, students were asked to provide responses to a number of questions, which are elaborated in the following chapters. The method used in this study was also innovative in recognising

that such personal statements were open to interpretation based on theories other than humanistic sociology.

In writing down their thoughts and feelings about the texts, the participant students in this research revealed the extent of the ‘transactional’ experiences with the literary text and their processes of cognitive learning. In this way, the advantages of such personal statements for qualitative research analysis were extended beyond Znaniecki’s humanistic theory of interacting values and attitudes to embrace Rosenblatt’s educational theories on students’ ‘aesthetic’ reading of the literary text, as well as Vygotsky’s concepts of cognitive psychology and the imagination.

### **3.3 The Student Participants and Their Data**

The research began within the Independent College at the Year Nine level and progressed through each year level to Year Twelve. Twenty-two students out of an English class of twenty-nine participated in the Year Nine study. They comprised a mixed gender cohort, approximately half and half. The number of students was reduced to nine in Year Ten. They, too, were a mixed group of three males and six females. Many of the original Year Nine students had been allocated to English classes elsewhere, four others were not willing to participate in this research and some left the school. The nine students, who remained in the teacher/researcher’s English lessons, continued as participants in the same class through Year Eleven and Year Twelve.

Each year level of the research was based on the study of particular texts. For the Years

Nine, Ten and Twelve studies, the data were primarily a collection of statements written by the students in answer to specific questions on the relevant texts asked by the teacher/researcher. The questions were broad and open-ended designed to give the students the chance to express their own thoughts and ideas. These are presented in full at the beginning of each data analysis chapter. To this was added the students' discussions with the teacher/researcher within the formal classroom environment, based on observation and/or notation of key points discussed. In the Year Eleven study the teacher/researcher recorded a *memoir* is recorded, which dealt with her teaching of the two texts, to complement the student data.

### **3.4 The Teacher's Memoir**

To gain some understanding of the teacher/researcher's perspective, she recorded a *memoir* based on her memory of events in the classroom discussions of two particular texts that were analysed and decontextualized (van der Veer & Valsiner 1991; Wells 1994).

As far back as ancient Greece, Plato assigned some importance to the topic of memory. He recognized that "Memory is finite by nature" and attributed "life to it". To him "Live memory repeats the presence of the *eidos* [ideas], and truth is also the possibility of repetition through recall. Truth unveils the *eidos*" (Derrida 1999, pp. 439-441). According to Derrida, Plato's ideas have applications that are relevant today. "That recourse says something about the profound complicity of ideas and representation of truth and all the signifying traits and techniques usually expelled as writing" (Derrida

1999, p. 448). Memoirs give time to the writers to recall past events, “relive the memories” and “reflect judgement”. If some memories are “more vivid than others, it is because the former loom larger in their consciousness and hence continue to influence their current pattern of thoughts and actions” (Secombe & Zajda 1999, pp. 161-162). One of the main advantages of memoirs, as research data, is that their authors reflect in their writings the social and cultural milieu in which they live. The two, writer and context, are seen as an integral whole.

The *memoir* was written by the teacher/researcher who, as an active agent within the Year Eleven classroom, voiced in writing her assessment of the students’ responses, reactions, understandings and attitudes pertaining to the two Year Eleven texts: a novel and a poem. In this instance, the memoir was based on the memory of the teacher who recounted the discussions with the students. At times this was reinforced by jotted notes and set written assignments of the students. The milieu of the classroom and the students that were a part of it, the reality of the teacher’s discussions, and the interactions with the students at the centre of literary learning were directly reflected through the teacher’s eyes in the memoir she wrote.

### **3.5 Linguistic Analysis**

Within the analysis of all the written data, particular emphasis was placed on the students’ choice of words which elucidated their literal, implied, metaphoric and symbolic meanings. This enabled the researcher to link the students’ complex or simplistic meanings to the theoretical concepts in a sociological, educational and

psychological sense. The English words used by the students are their chosen expression of their knowledge, ideas, emotions, understandings and attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’ or ‘marginalized other’. To learn English as words and phrases (phonology) is “not to memorize [as] a set of utterances; [but] it is to master a system of rules and norms which make it possible to produce and understand utterances”. The distinction between “rule and behaviour is [also] crucial to any study concerned with the production or communication of meaning” (Culler 1999, pp. 74-75). The in-depth analysis of the students’ words highlighted many aspects of their meanings which reflected upon their levels of understanding and attitudes, “behaviour”, toward those with a different culture.

Linguistic analysis is used to recognise that meaning is formed by the choice and order of the words included within the sentence, as well as grammatical usage, such as, tenses within the sentence. In the analysis of the students’ data, and generally in the thesis, the Present Tense is primarily used as a grammatical signification which anticipates meaning (Lacan 1999, p. 194). This connects with the students’ ideas, attitudes and the researcher’s analytical processes in evaluating a lexicological understanding of their words and underlying meanings. In this regard, grammar and language are used, for instance, in irony, metaphor and satire in order “to signify *something quite other* than what it says” (Lacan 1999, p. 195; de Saussure 1999).

### **3.6 Analysis of Data**

In the analysis of the data there was a congruence of the sociological, educational and

psychological theories which helped to distil the essence of the data. To make more complete sense of the data, Florian Znaniecki's sociology, Louise Rosenblatt's educational theory, and Lev Vygotsky's psychological concepts provided important and complementary insights. All these theories enhanced the data investigation and the discourse during the thesis.

### **3.6.1 Rosenblatt's Concepts used in Interpreting Students' Responses to Literary Text**

The literary text in the English classroom is an important 'cultural' and 'psychological tool' which aids the student to understand any meaning, be it overt or covert, that an author expounds in literature. For these meanings to be elucidated by the students it is imperative that their engagement with the literary text is, what Louise M. Rosenblatt calls, *aesthetic reading*. This entails an in-depth reading which elicits profound understanding and digs deep for explanation of the words, implied or explicit. The involvement of the student with the text brings a fulfilment "during the reading event" as an "actual experience he [or she] is living through" (Rosenblatt 1978, p. 27). The interaction between the reader and the text is the *transactional experience* which allows the student to become deeply involved with the plot, characterisations and thematic meanings of literature. These concepts became important in analysing the post-text students' written data which describes their responses toward the 'cultural other' after 'experiencing' the literary text in its full *aesthetic* meaning. The *transactional experience* allows then the student, in a formal English classroom, to use the literary text as a 'psychological tool' for 'mediation' of the 'higher mental processes' in the mind.

### 3.6.2 Vygotsky's Concepts in the Interpretation of Student Responses

Vygotsky's concepts proved useful as a way of analysing the students' cognitive processes in regard to what they read, what meaning they gained from the literary texts, what understanding they perceived and, subsequently, what new attitudes they developed toward the 'cultural other'. Of central interest was identifying the impact of an expert other (for example, the teacher) and mediatory tools (such as, the literary texts) to advance 'higher mental processes' within the consciousness of the student.

Vygotsky viewed language as an important 'semiotic mediator' which could range from simple to complex systems. This meant that literature could act as a 'psychological tool' "transforming natural impulse into higher mental processes" (Kozulin, 1990, p. 114; Daniels, 2003; Vygotsky 1999). The researcher in her analysis of the students' writings was looking for evidence of such transformations in their attitudes to 'cultural others'. The literary texts are the 'psychological tool' by which meaning is extrapolated by the students and intrapsychological processes begin to form within each individual student and create transformations of understandings and attitudes.

This process may be understood on the conceptual level as a movement from *spontaneous* (or *everyday*) to *scientific concepts*. Vygotsky confirmed the role of educators in promoting higher order "development by introducing the child to scientific causal reasoning which, once mastered, spreads to other domains of the child's thinking" (van der Veer, 2007, p. 94). The child's *spontaneous* or as Vygotsky preferred, 'everyday' concept of his/her life in the home and other public domains constitute

knowledge of experiential and informal learning. By *scientific* concepts, “Vygotsky meant concepts that had been explicitly introduced by a teacher at school” which were disseminated ideas in a systemic and organized manner (van der Veer & Valsiner 1991, p. 270). The *scientific* concepts were generally concerned to “explain the development of what he [Vygotsky] called the higher mental functions and, in particular, of decontextualized thinking” (Wells 1994, p. 2; Vygotsky 1987).

The application of *scientific* concepts reflects appropriately the method of the students’ interaction with literary texts which are concerned with the

*development of word meanings [that] are one and the same process [which focus] on the systematic relationships between word meanings that instruction brings the semantic aspect of speech to conscious awareness. And this in turn, enables the child to make the transition to a higher level of thinking (Wells, 1994, p. 2).*

### **3.6.3 Classifying the Data**

One of the elements to classify the data was a continuum of Positivity of Attitudes towards the ‘cultural other’ or ‘marginalised other’. In the Years Nine and Ten studies, it enabled the researcher to gauge a starting point, and an end point of students’ attitudes toward the ‘cultural other.’ The descriptors used for this continuum were devised with a starting point of Personally Negative, gradually continuing to Generally Negative, then moving to Unsure/Ambiguous, emerging to Generally Positive and finishing with the most Personally Positive descriptor. This was particularly applicable to the Year Nine study (see Chart 4.1). However, many of the descriptors were also used for Year Ten and referred to throughout the thesis. In the analysis of the students’ data, especially in their



post-text statements, it became clear how the students' in-depth reading of literature and 'transaction' with the literary text influenced their attitudes toward the 'cultural other'.

The other element utilized for the interpretation of the data was Personalized Depth of Understanding, derived from Vygotsky's concepts. The descriptors used were helpful in deciding how the students understood the literary texts and how they cognitively processed changes in attitudes to the 'cultural other' through their imaginative minds, in the absence of actual experience of the 'cultural other'. The graduated descriptors began with Negative Stereotyping, gradually deepening to incorporating Basic Facts, then experiencing the emotional factor, Pity For. Next stage was for students to reveal Some Personal Understanding and if reached the end of this continuum, it showed a deepened Empathy With 'the cultural other'. These descriptors also were applied throughout the analysis and discussions of data in Chapters Four, Five and Six (see Chart 4.1).

The results of the Year Nine study, based on literary texts concerning Australia's Aboriginal people, are reported and discussed in the next Chapter.

## **Chapter Four: Year Nine Study – Film and Literary Text on Australian Aboriginals**

### **4.1 Year Nine Students and the Study of Texts about Australian Aboriginals**

The study reported in this chapter investigates the ways in which a Year Nine class of twenty-two of twenty-nine mainstream Anglo-Australian students was influenced by studying two texts on Australian Aboriginal people. During the before phase of this investigation, the aim was to ask the students to write about what they knew and how they felt towards Australian Aboriginal people. Subsequently, the students were again asked to write down their thoughts and feelings about indigenous Australians after their immersion in their studies and discussions of the texts. It was anticipated that a comparative analysis of the two sets of written comments would demonstrate how far, and in what ways, the study of relevant and sympathetic literary texts could change the students' understanding of Aboriginal people as the 'cultural other'.

The investigation was carried out as part of the researcher's regular teaching of a Year Nine English class at an Independent College. As indicated earlier, the school was very monocultural in its orientation. The Year Nine class concerned was all born and educated in Australia. Although most of their parents were Australian or British born, a few were immigrants from Europe. As mentioned before, the class was a mixed cohort of males and females, approximately half and half in numbers. With this group of students, the teacher/ researcher undertook a study of texts focusing on the lives and experiences of Aboriginal people.

The two texts studied were the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* by director Phillip Noyce and a book of poems, letters and memoirs, *Urgent* edited by Leanne Rowe. *Rabbit Proof Fence* is a film set at the turn of the twentieth century about the ‘Stolen Generation’ which is the term used in reference to the Aboriginal children taken from their parents and placed in Christian institutions. The children were taught to read and write English as well as to practise the Christian faith. They were prepared for domestic service or some kind of apprenticeship for both girls and boys. Eventually they were sent to various homes, outback stations or cities to assimilate into a ‘white’ society (Westphalen 2012). The film portrays the trauma of three young Aboriginal girls being taken from their family out in the bush and transported to a Christian institution run by nuns. They escaped from the institution and walked along the rabbit proof fence, erected through the outback regions of Australia to keep out rabbits from sown pastures. The film depicts their agonizing journey to return to their Aboriginal family in northern Australia. The white people’s rationale and theories do not prevent the abuses that unfold in the film and not least of all their actions to tear away the Aboriginal children from their families. This is the essence of the film which the Year Nine class viewed and discussed.

The film was one term’s work in which approximately four lessons per week of forty minutes per lesson were devoted to interpreting, analysing and writing an essay about the visual text. Emphasis was placed on discussing the cinematic techniques with which the students had become familiar before seeing the film. The director, Phillip Noyce used many cinematic techniques which the students were able to identify. This was an essential element to the learning and some comparison was made with a novel and the

author's use of words to describe characters, settings, emotions, and colours in portraying the ambience of each scene. Once the students understood that cinematic techniques were the tools used by the director, instead of words, to convey mood and progression of the plot, it enabled them to select a specific scene and analyse its purpose, emotion and affect upon the viewer. One of these examples was the scene of the three Aboriginal girls trudging along the fence line, worn out, hungry and pursued like prey by the 'white' police authorities. The camera angle often showed a high overhead shot to emphasize vulnerability in the protagonists.

Another element of the learning was the teacher led discussion around the visual text in the classroom, where students were asked questions and their responses were written on the white board. These answers were thus shared with everyone in class, who diligently copied all of the comments in their English books. This dissemination of the students' thoughts, analysis and imagination became a compilation of ideas for their own use. These were added to the teacher's and other critics' opinions about the film to create a sense of fulfilment and knowledge on several different levels.

Having seen the film and after due pedagogic discussions, the Year Nine class read parts of the text *Urgent*, edited by Leanne Rowe. It is a text about an Aboriginal man, Albert Thompson, who was taken from his family at the age of four years; his extraordinary gift as an artist, photographer and poet; and his three daughters with whom he had lost contact. He suffered ill health from poor nutrition of a high fat diet, hypertension, angina, diabetes, obesity, blindness and depression, but refused to attend the local hospital due to

past experiences of racism. He was a poor compliant for taking his medication. He smoked sixty cigarettes a day. He lived in the town of Koorowa northern Queensland. This information was from Dr. Jason Fitzgerald's medical notes when he attended him (Rowe 2003, p. 23). The description above of Albert Thompson demonstrates the dire repercussions of being part of the 'stolen generation'. In Albert's case, his inability to help himself for a better mental and healthy life style proved to be his ultimate demise. One of his poems, which reflect his life's journey, is discussed and analysed later in this chapter in relation to the class' post-film study and discussion. There were no formal written data on this particular text, although, in-depth discourse between students and teacher ensued.

#### **4.2 The Students' Writings and their Analysis**

The method adopted for this investigation involved a pre- and post-film collection of student data centred on the viewing and discussion of the film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Twenty-two of the twenty-nine students in the Year Nine class being taught by the teacher/ researcher completed this collection of data. Before the commencement of the study of the film the students were asked to respond to the question: "What do you know and think about Aboriginal people in Australia?" The students' responses appeared to be frank and genuine, some revealing a wide range of attitudes, levels of knowledge and understanding. The question that followed after viewing the film was: "What were your perceptions of the 'Stolen Generation' and what were your feelings, thoughts and emotions during and after the viewing of the film?" This question was divided into three parts which the students answered appropriately in writing to cover its whole meaning.

The researcher's analysis sought evidence of change in thinking and feeling in the comparison of the two answers given by each student: pre- and post-film viewing. Each student's pre- and post-film comments were subjected to a comparative analysis focusing, particularly, on their use of linguistic discourse in order to understand the extent and nature of any changes in their thinking and feelings about Aboriginal peoples.

An initial reading of all comments suggested that it was possible to make use of relevant sociological concepts of Znaniecki and psychological constructs of Vygotsky (see Chart 4.1) by plotting each student's before and after position along two dimensions. These were Positivity of Attitudes toward Aboriginal people and Depth of Personalised Understanding in the cognitive and emotional processing of knowledge and experience about them. When these two dimensions were set up as a chart to form the horizontal and vertical axes, respectively, the line joining the two points plotted on these two axes indicated the trajectory of the students' change in understanding Aboriginal people as the 'cultural other'.

A closer reading of the students' comments led to a development of descriptors across each dimension. In the case of Positivity of Attitudes toward the Aboriginal 'cultural other', these could be seen to range across a continuum from Personally Negative through Generally Negative to Generally Positive and finally Personally Positive, with Ambiguous Attitudes as the midpoint. It was possible to detect definite linguistic indicators to distinguish those students who revealed a personal commitment to the views they expressed as opposed to those who were giving a general view. Comments in which

students used as pronouns: 'I', 'me', 'my' or 'we', 'us', 'ours', such as, "I hate their smell" or "I think they are human beings just like us", could be interpreted as Personally Negative or Personally Positive attitudes. These contrasted with more impersonal generalizations, for example, "Aborigines are good at sports" or "Aborigines hang around in packs" which can be interpreted as revealing Generally Positive or Generally Negative attitudes. In the midpoint of Ambiguous attitudes, the students indicated a sense of being Unsure and Ambiguous, recognising some positive aspects, but feeling negative on others.

The second dimension of analysis was related to Depth of Personalized Understanding of the students' cognitive and emotional processing of the knowledge about and understanding of Aboriginal peoples to which they had been exposed before and after the film. The students' comments suggested five hierarchical descriptors for this dimension. At the negative end of the continuum was Negative Stereotyping or misunderstandings based on inaccurate, inadequate or biased facts. This section included spontaneous ideas derived from parents, peers and media which were allied with experiences of indigenous people from a distance while in shopping centres, parks, cinemas or streets. Some of their ideas were pre-judgements fused with basic facts, such as, "Aborigines have bad language and they are always swearing", "always drunk" or "they sniff petrol", appearing alongside "Aborigines live in D.P" or they made the "boomerang". Naturally, not all Aboriginals swear, are drunk at all times or sniff petrol. The students stereotyped the Aboriginals from what they saw or heard, rather than personally experienced them as individuals.

The next stage was whether students knew Basic Facts about Aboriginal people; these were correct, but did not conceptually shift the learner emotionally toward a positive attitude or deepen understanding. Some of the comments mentioned were that “they lived here before white people”, they are “black”, they have a “low life expectancy” or “Uluru is an Aboriginal name for Ayres Rock”; and the creation of the “boomerang” was another cited fact. This factual knowledge about the indigenous Australians was readily mentioned by the students as general knowledge and without negative emotional intent or judgement – rather it was more of a neutral stance.

Following the continuum downward to show the depth of Pity For the ‘cultural other’, the students had shown in their comments an emotional understanding for the Aboriginals. The *Australian Oxford Dictionary* defines ‘pity’ as a “feeling of sorrow for another person’s suffering”. There was a sense of recognition of the ‘other’s’ experience in their remarks, such as, “I felt very sorry for the Aboriginals”, “I felt sad when their sister was taken” and “anger that people could do that to another culture”. Sadness and sorrow were common emotions that the students felt to express their pity for the Australian Aboriginals, thus it showed an evaluation of the hardship imposed upon the indigenous people.

The next level of personalization was demonstrated in some students’ comments which revealed Some Personal Understanding. The basic facts, described above, were situated in the historical context, which has substantially impacted upon the cultural integrity of Australia’s indigenous people. There were some lucid and explicit remarks that



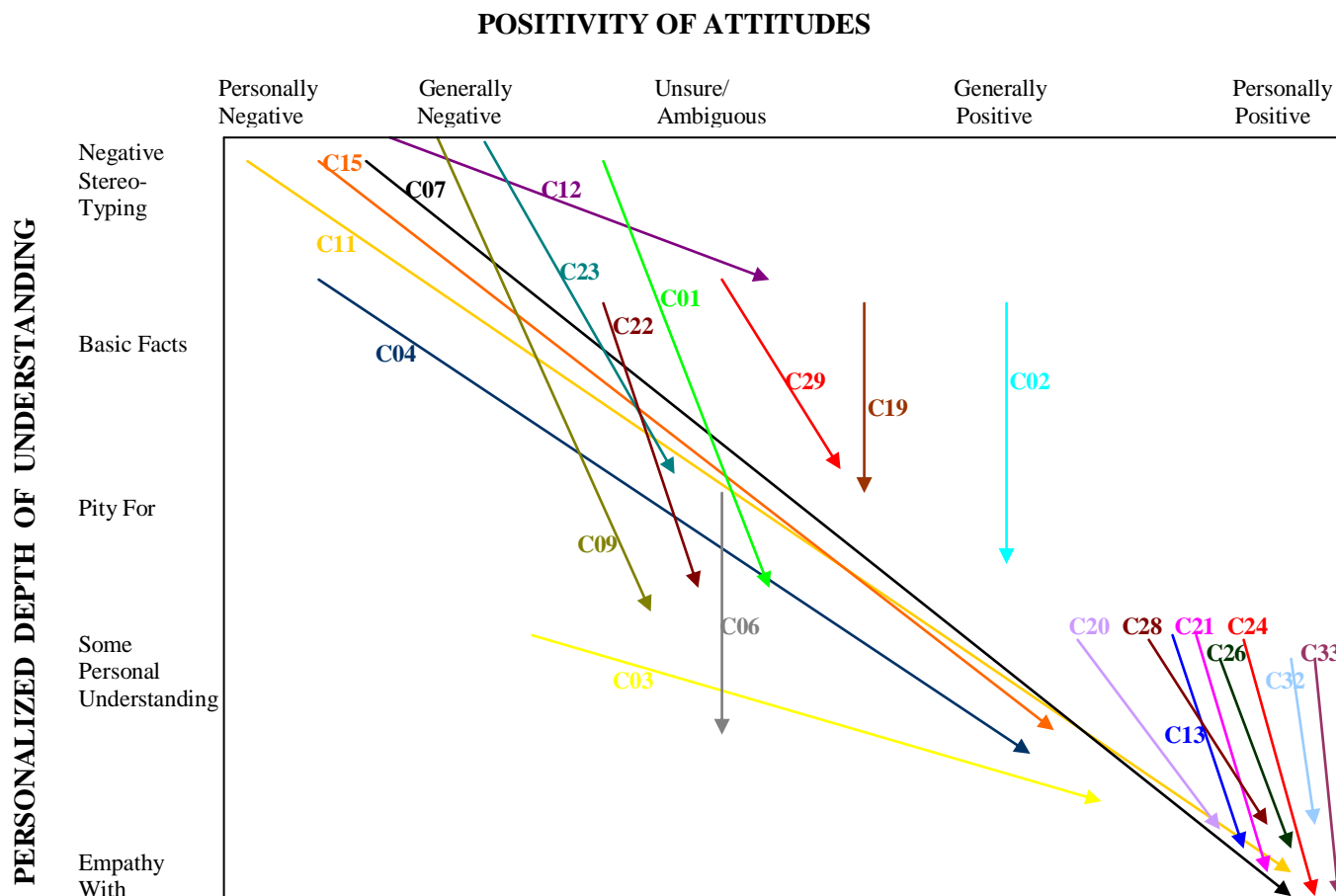
supported this personal understanding of what the other had experienced. One student stated that “I realized that the whites were not just taking away the children, they were taking away their culture as well” and another wrote “I think the white men were ignorant of the Aboriginal culture and tried to force their own culture on the Aboriginal people.” Another student came to the personal understanding that “I felt like even if I was with them, I couldn’t have done anything to stop it.” The student revealed that she was now conscious of the impact of white settlement.

In the final stage of Empathy With Aboriginal people, the above concept of Personal Understanding had opened the capacity for empathy. C.R. Rogers defines empathy as “an accurate, empathic understanding of the client’s world as seen from the inside. To sense the client’s private world as if it were your own” (Rogers 1961, p. 284). In comparison to ‘pity’, empathy is generally considered a deeper feeling than a pitying view that is limited to feeling sorry for another’s plight. Pity lacks the deeper projected experience of another’s situation. Therefore, some of the students could be interpreted as empathizing with the suffering experienced due to the impact of white settlement. The students’ comments expressed recognition of ‘cultural others’ as human beings like themselves. The claim that Aboriginals are “one of us”, which is inclusive of both Aboriginals and whites as one population, can be seen to encompass both cognitive and emotional elements of comprehension. It represented the opposite of Negative Stereotyping which denigrated Aboriginal people as “them”, the alien ‘other’, quite different and separate “from us”. One student embraced Empathy With the Aboriginals by remarking “I thought about how I would have felt if that were my children that were

being taken.” The concept of Empathy was the descriptor that marked the deepest level of Personalised Understanding

The descriptors along the two dimensions were then used as criteria to judge from the students’ own comments where they should be placed on Chart 4.1. This chart presents the trajectories of change plotted for each student.

**CHART 4.1**  
**SHIFT IN ATTITUDES AND UNDERSTANDING**



A quick eye scan of the chart reveals the student changes fell into several distinct groupings defined by similar end-points. The extent and slope of the change lines and nature of the changes are plotted from the students' pre- and post-film comments. The four categories identified are:

1. Minor Change in Negative and/or Ambiguous Attitudes with some Gain in Depth of Personalized Understanding - (six students);
2. No Change in Ambiguous or Generally Positive Attitudes with some Gain in Depth of Personalized Understanding - (three students);
3. From Negative to Positive Attitudes with Considerable Gain in Depth of Personalized Understanding – (Five students);
4. Minimal or No Change in Positive Attitudes with Greater Depth of Understanding – (Eight students)

A detailed discussion of each student's pre- and post-film comments, together with an explication of how they were judged along each dimension according to the criteria of the descriptors on the chart is given below. The discussion is organized under the category headings. Frequent reference is made to the student's own words and phrases in order to justify their placement on the chart. These quotations are given verbatim as the students wrote them, and hence may include abbreviations, inaccurate spelling and grammar and colloquial language. In the interests of clarity an explanatory work or comment is provided sometimes by the researcher in square brackets. Of importance, once more, is the researcher's use of the Present Tense to retain the immediacy of the students' comments. In some instances the researcher indicates incorrect spelling, in the students'

statements, by the use of [sic], but not for all inaccuracies. This is done for the sake of greater clarity of understanding. Where there is mention of the descriptor terms the first letter is capitalised.

**4.3 1. Minor Change in Negative and/or Ambiguous Attitudes with Some Gain in Depth of Personalized Understanding - Students: C01, C09, C12, C22, C23 and C29**

There were six students whose comments before and after studying the film depicted minor changes in their negative or ambiguous attitudes, but reveal some gain in the depth of their understanding toward the indigenous Australians. The responses of each student are analysed in depth by the researcher as a means of allowing the reader to readily compare and judge the extent of the student's development in attitudes and understanding as a result of studying the film.

The pre-film statement of student C12 has elements of a personally negative attitude and negative stereotyping of supposed Aboriginal violence.

**C12** *Australia's Aboriginals camp in front of old Parliament House and ruin the scenery; they're black; Destroyed the megafauna of Megalaysia They're racist. If you fight back they'll get their relatives and probably kill you. Dot painting. First in Australia; live in the bush. I think they should try and deal with us and befriend us instead of winge and gang up on people. They're very racist. Some are alright though.*

The above comments are frank and relayed as the student perceived the indigenous Australians. Some of the remarks are derogatory and are quite possibly based on perceptions of Aboriginals who live in the northern districts of Adelaide and what is seen in the news on television and other media. This may be the source for his statement that "Australia's Aboriginals camp in front of old Parliament House". He then predicates

with the observation that they “ruin the scenery”. This is his estimation of the scene, although, he lacks the cognition or maturity to ask whether others, who are not Aboriginals, also “ruin the scenery” when they protest or indeed camp in front of Parliament House.

Twice in this student’s comments he labelled the indigenous Australians as ‘racist’. It is obvious that in his view the onus is placed upon the Aboriginals to “befriend us” (whites) and not the other way around. The use of the word “us”, twice in one sentence, together with double use of “They’re very racist” shows that the student has separated the whites from the Aboriginals to “us” and “they”. The comments are Generally Negative about Aboriginals who “Destroyed the megafauna of Megalaysia” and could “get their relatives and probably kill you.” There is here, also, an associative perception that the indigenous Australians are violent, whereby “If you fight back” you will probably end up dead. There is a small dispersion of basic facts that “they’re black, and that some Aboriginals do “Dot painting.” The question is not asked: why do they “winge” and act as the student perceives them? These are strong statements of fear which reflect the media’s coverage of any violent occurrence in the northern suburbs. Naturally, what the student does not realise is that some government policies and action need to be developed to address such problems among the most vulnerable in society, such as the Australian Aboriginals.

Student C12’s response, post-film, demonstrates his thoughts and emotions about the indigenous Aboriginals as follows:

**C12** *Before I saw the film my perception [sic] of the ‘Stolen Generation’ was: I thought the aboriginals . . . shouldn’t have tried to stop us because we were just trying to*

*help. I think that they could have tried to deal with what has been happening better, but I also think that they have suffered a big loss. They were very protective of their children. I thought that the white people were not being overly nice to the Aboriginals.*

The student's tone in the above response is less disparaging than his statement made before seeing the film. There are no more bold derogatory words such as "racist" and accusatory violent actions of "probably kill you." Much of the fear has dissipated and there is a sense of cognitive recognition that the situation involved not just the Aboriginals, but also the "white people who weren't being overly nice to the Aboriginals." On the one hand, he states that "they could have tried to deal with what has been happening better" and on the other he rationalizes, "but I think that they have suffered a big loss; they were very protective of their children." This demonstrates his Ambiguous attitude towards the indigenous people and he reinforces it with his continued reference to the Aboriginals as "they" and the white people as "we"; the division still remains as in his preliminary pre-film comments that "they should try and deal with us and befriend us". In his post-film statement he paraphrases the same sentiment as "they could have tried to deal with what has been happening better".

Although in parts of the above response to the film has a sense of implied conciliatory meaning, it still remains that the student is Unsure and Ambiguous in his attitudes towards the Australian Aboriginals. The student may continue to regard the Aboriginals that he encounters in the streets of the northern suburbs as dangerous, however, this consideration may be disposed to some equanimity of judgement having experienced, through the literary visual text, the opposite view to his Generally Negative and

Ambiguous stance. His understanding has thus taken some account of the Basic Facts concerning the ‘stolen generation’.

Student C23, in his pre-film comments, writes words that are Basic Facts and some positive attributes that describe the indigenous Australians.

**C23** *Aboriginals have black skin; quick runners; also known as coons; called petrol sniffers; most are not wealthy; good at footy; have big noses; fight in packs; eat wicity grubs; hunt with sticks; do the rituals with paint. They socialize around the northern suburbs.*

These preliminary comments are generally Negative Stereotyping listed in a detached manner and written in the third person narrative which further disengages him from any interaction with indigenous Australians. Some of the remarks are positive Basic Facts, such as, they are “quick runners” and “good at footy”. There is a great deal of similarity to student C09’s pre-film statement. Student C23 makes his comments by observation of the Aboriginals who “socialize around the northern suburbs.” Both of these students remark on the visibility of the Aboriginal people they see in the “northern suburbs” and state that they have “big noses”. This opinion of the student’s is based upon the exteriority of the person they observe from a distance: in the streets, shopping centres or parklands. Student C23 extends the image he has attained of the Aboriginal people to include them fighting “in packs.” This metaphorical image, which is similar to student C19’s, may lend itself to an association with a wolf “pack” – one which is imagined as being less than human. This confirms the lack of personal interaction involved with any of the Australian Aboriginals.

In some contrast to the above statement, this student's post-film comments are in some ways encouraging. Student C23 comments that

**C23** *My perceptions before I saw Rabbit Proof Fence was that the aboriginal people didn't deserve to be given money because they were aboriginal but now I can see why. The aboriginal people lost a lot of their choice and became controlled by the white people's law. I felt sad because of how they were treated. I still feel the same, but I feel sorry for the 'Stolen Generation' for what they went through.*

The above student's remarks reveal the impact of the film and discourse in class which appears to have had a considerable impression on his views. The student is able to see "why" they now deserve to be given money by the government. After all "The aboriginal people lost a lot of their choice and became controlled by the white people's law." This student shows more clarity in his understanding of the Aboriginal 'Stolen Generation' and of the Aboriginal general situation, although he states that "I still feel the same". Basically, much depends on how the sentence "I still feel the same" is interpreted. Does it mean that the student has reverted to his original views of the Aboriginals before seeing the film, or does it mean that his original impressions are still with him? Nonetheless, with the Pity that is revealed in his writing, in that he "felt sad" and "sorry", he now demonstrates a deeper understanding of the indigenous Australians. In this case, the visual text opened his mind to acknowledge and understand a different view on Aboriginals' suffering caused by the 'white' people of Australia. In this student's writing it can be said that, post-film, there are still some Ambiguous attitudes, but now with a greater depth of Personal Understanding of the 'cultural other'.



Some attitudes of C22 can be seen to correspond to the Basic Facts that prevail in other students' statements in this category. The following is a record of the student's pre-film comments:

**C22** *They have a different culture; they have different rituals; they have lived in Australia for 1000s of years. They have dark skin; they are less resistant to alcohol; they lived off the land of Australia; they perform a 'rain dance'. They live off the government.*

Many of the student's comments are Basic Fact information where there is some understanding of the Aboriginals' "different culture", "different rituals", "lived in Australia for 1000s of years" and "they have dark skin." These are the safe remarks about a people who are very different than the white population. As he delves into some of their problems, such as, being "less resistant to alcohol", a formation of the student's, not only knowledge, but personal understanding begins to take shape. Whilst they "lived off the land" Aboriginals were able to "perform a 'rain dance'"; now "they live off the government." The meaning here implies that the indigenous Aboriginals have become less active and can now only depend on government handouts which suggests a Generally Negativity attitude. The tenor of the above statement is similar to students C01 and C09 where the Basic Facts are listed without emotive connotations; this creates a detachment which is confirmed with the student's third person style of writing.

Dissimilarly, to his pre-film statements, student C22 writes in a more personalized tone for his post-film comments.

**C22** *I thought that aboriginal people were extremely primitive compared to the whites and that it was wrong for whites to steal their children but it was because they thought they were doing them good. I also thought that a part of the aboriginals are quite good but the other part ruin their whole reputation by bludging and*

*taking drugs/breaking the law. I felt sorry for the aboriginals and felt that everyone was out to get them. I also felt sad when their sister was taken. I have the same feelings and I'm happy that the two sisters are still alive.*

Although student C22 regards the Aboriginal people as “extremely primitive compared to the whites”, he feels that it was “wrong to steal their children”, even though ‘whites’ justified it by claiming that “they were doing them good.” The projected emotion was that of Pity as the student felt “sorry” and “sad” for what was happening to the Aboriginals. The student concedes that “part” of the indigenous people “ruin their whole reputation” of the other Aboriginals by “bludging and taking drugs/breaking the law.” Here the student is recognizing both sides of the Aboriginal condition. He concludes that his “feelings” remain the “same”, which reveals an Ambiguous attitude as he struggles with the uncertainty of his “feelings”. The personalized style of his post-film writing contains a sparing use of the pronoun “I”, which is in contrast to his impersonalized initial statement, but the second half of the last sentence concludes with a positive support for the trials of the “two sisters who are still alive.” He does display some Pity For and Personal Understanding of the indigenous Aboriginals, although his positivity of attitude remains Unsure and Ambiguous.

The following are student C01’s pre-film remarks:

**C01** *The Aboriginal culture is strong. The Didgeridoo is an Aboriginal instrument. Clapping sticks are Aboriginal. Uluru is an Aboriginal name for Ayres Rock. Most Aboriginals live in Northern Territory or South Australia. Aboriginals are known for sniffing petrol, doing drugs and being alcoholics. Some of them eat widedee grubs. They created the boomerang. Not all of them are bad. They paint the walls of caves.*

The student’s comments demonstrate knowledge that is Basic Facts about Aboriginal people: “The Didgeridoo”, “Uluru”, and that “Most of them live in Northern Territory or

South Australia". The Generally Negative tone of her remarks of the indigenous Australians is seen in her stereotypical views that they are known for "sniffing petrol, doing drugs and being alcoholics." There is one saving grace in the last two remarks that "Not all of them are bad" and "they paint the walls of caves." The language of this statement, similar to the previous ones, is detached, written impersonally in third person with Aboriginal people consistently referred to as "them" and "they".

In contrast, the student's post-film statement is as follows:

**C01** *Before I watched Rabbit Proof I thought that some Aboriginals were ungrateful and they get more things from the government than what whites do. I thought it was unfair [sic] how children got taken from their families but it could've been for the best. I thought it was pretty sad, but I felt like 'You go girl!' when the girls were escaping. I thought that the police were a bit rough and when the children got stolen I thought that the Aboriginal women were going crazy. I still think that some of them are ungrateful and they still get more privileges than whites, but I don't think the 'Stolen Generation' should've been taken from their families.*

The above comments are personalized with the repetitive "I" that is used with some emotion in "I thought it was pretty sad," and support for the girls who were escaping which made her feel "like 'You go girl!'" This demonstrates that some form of emotion and sympathy for the girls had been aroused within the student. This was underpinned in the decisive exclamation mark after the word "girl!" There is also a display of Some Personal Understanding of the Aboriginal girls' plight to escape; she feels it was "unfair" that the girls and their families were ill treated by the police. This, however, is contrasted with the comments that it "could've been for the best" that the children were taken and that, although the police were "a bit rough", the Aboriginal women were "going crazy" after their children were forcibly removed from them. Such juxtaposed comments suggest that the student's post-film stance is one of ambiguity, rather than her

initial Generally Negative attitude. This is reinforced by her post-film statements that some Aboriginals are “ungrateful and still get more privileges than whites”. Altogether there is an undoubted sense of an Ambiguous attitude in her second response, but she does depict some move toward a Personal Understanding of the situation of the ‘cultural other’ in her closing words that the children should not have “been taken from their families’. As a result, her response has been charted as going beyond Pity For and closer to Some Personal Understanding for the ‘cultural other’.

There is a contrast of opinion in student C09’s pre-film statement to those of other students, yet it is quite similar, in some ways, to student C01’s response.

**C09** *They sniff petrol; they steal shoes; they try stab you; they got big noses; they always high. All I heard is they can be nice and some are bad.*

The above student’s comments demonstrate that there is no interaction with any Aboriginal person and as he states “All I heard is they can be nice and some are bad.” The student’s knowledge is based on what he has “heard” and the visuality observation that they have “big noses,” not unlike student C23’s pre-film comments. Similarly to student C01, the tenor of his statement is also written in an impersonal way by the use of the third person “they”, which emphasizes his dismissal of them as the ‘cultural other’. The impassivity of his comments, which are almost written as if in a list, reinforces this detachment from Aboriginal people and reflects a Generally Negative attitude toward them. The negative connotations: “sniff petrol”, “steal shoes”, “try stab you”, and “always high” reinforce this negative attitude and stereotypic understanding, as with student C01.

In contrast, after he has seen the film, the tone of his comments have, somewhat, mellowed. He states that

**C09** *I thought it was where the Aboriginals got taken away because the white men feared the Aboriginals and tried to get the Aboriginals into their own culture. I thought it was pretty cruel what they were doing to the aboriginals because they were not harming anyone, they were trying to live their own life. I still think the same about them. Some Aboriginals are ok but you can get some feral ones.*

The student now shifts from General Negative and displays some depth of Personal Understanding in which he recognises how “cruel” they [white people] were towards the “aboriginals”. This time he is able to cognitively reason that after all “they [Aboriginals] were not harming anyone they were trying to live their own life.” His preliminary comments were based on what he had “heard” from others and seen about the indigenous Australians. However, even after the study of the film and the interactive classroom discourse around the text among the students and teacher, the student states that “I still think the same about them” and concludes with a re-statement of the attitude he expressed before viewing the film. His attitude is now expressed in the context of a statement that goes beyond Pity, to just above the level of Some Personal Understanding of the predicaments of the Aboriginal people, therefore, his attitude to them can be said to have moved no further than to the position of Ambiguous; after all he “still feels the same.”

Student C29’s comments also contain some Basic Facts, similarly to the other students in this category, and are briefly listed as his pre-film knowledge and understanding of the Australian Aboriginal.

**C29** *They have dark hair; they have a weaker resistance towards alcohol; they have dark brown skin; they were the original Australians; their traditional religion is*

*not Christian. I don't know [what to think about Aboriginals], I haven't met any, and don't want to make a generalization.*

This student's impersonal response lists some Basic Facts of information about Australia's Aboriginal people, such as, their "dark hair", "dark brown skin", "the original Australians" and that "their traditional religion is not Christian." However, there is no negative stereotyping. In this case the student may not want, as he states, to "make a generalization" if he is unaware, specifically, about the Aboriginals. This particular student emigrated from Britain, some years ago, and may, genuinely, not have sufficient knowledge about or interaction with the indigenous Australian. His statement reflects an Unsure personal opinion and he is wise enough not to generalize or make unfounded comments.

In his post-film comments there is a greater surety of opinion in his analysis of the film and in answer to the question states that he

**C29** *Didn't know any aboriginals – knew about stolen generation – was disgusted by it. Feelings were: sadness, racial guilt – Neville was evil, but was disgusted by his Darwin's attitude towards aboriginals. [Feelings and emotions are] Pretty much the same as before – but more pity.*

The above student is now able to display some emotions after he sees the film. Student C29 also reveals a deepening understanding and more comprehensible knowledge of the indigenous Australians. He felt "disgusted", "sadness", "racial guilt" and "pity". This explication of emotions is deeper in understanding than his initial statement, with some positivity in his analysis of how he was "disgusted by his [Neville's] Darwin's attitude towards aboriginals." He ends his statement by declaring that he feels "pretty much the same as before – but more pity."

In this, he continues to reveal some Ambiguous attitudes, yet, similarly to students C01, C09 and C22, also demonstrates a sense of Pity For the Aboriginal ‘cultural other’. After viewing the film he manages to just reach the level of Pity For and is able to display his condemnation of the white people’s irresponsible behaviour with comments, such as, “Neville was evil”. This is indicated on the chart with a yellow line and the tip of the arrow reaches that level. Although he does not quite reach the depth of understanding as the other three students, who surpass Pity For, he does show evidence of Pity For the Aboriginal Australians. Overall, students in this category, as a whole, demonstrate changes in level of understanding more frequently than a shift of attitudes.

#### **4.4 2. No Change in Ambiguous or Generally Positive Attitudes with Some Gains in Personalized Understanding – Students: C02, C06, C19**

Three of the students showed a distinctive pattern of shift, which is easily recognizable as the only vertical lines plotted on the Chart. The initial statements of the three revealed them to be either Ambiguous or Generally Positive toward Aboriginal people and their post-film comments showed no change in these basic attitudes. Nevertheless, it was possible to detect a greater depth in their understanding of the situation and plight of these indigenous others.

Student C19 demonstrates in his pre-film remarks an Ambiguous attitude toward the plight of Australia’s indigenous people.

**C19** *Australia’s Aboriginals were first to discover Australia; alot are funny; tribal people; some sniff petrol; most aren’t very rich; very affectionate to the land; good footy players; black skin colour; hang around in packs. I don’t know that much about them so I can’t really say but going on what I’ve heard they can be very nice people but some can be very bad.*

The above student recounts a mixture of Basic Facts of information and some Negative Stereotyping about indigenous Australians, which is more moderate in tone than the views expressed by some earlier respondents. He uses a mixture of both the impersonal third person and the personalized first person narrative. Although he states that he does not “know that much about them”, he is able to say that “alot are funny” and they are “very affectionate to the land.” The student balances his opinion with some negative comments that “some sniff petrol” and “hang around in packs”. Although the image of “packs” is derogatory and delineated towards a metaphorical group of animals, he simultaneously refers to the indigenous Australians as “good footy players”, “affectionate to the land” and reports that “they can be very nice people”. Overall his remarks are based on the little he “knows” and what he has “heard” without giving evidence of any personal interaction with the Aboriginal Australians.

The student’s post-film comments are weighed up in a comparable manner to his initial remarks before seeing the film. He concludes that

**C19** *My perceptions on the aboriginal population was that most are good people but the bad ones would bring the others down. My feelings, thoughts and emotions during the movie was that I felt sad to see what those people went through. I felt that we wouldn't like it if that happened to our people. My perceptions haven't changed because I was brought up with these people up in Darwin where I was born.*

In the above statement student C19 begins by seeing how some Aboriginals, “the bad ones would bring the others down.” He feels “sad” with what he has seen in *Rabbit Proof Fence* and shows some Pity For “what those people went through.” There is some display of understanding in his comparison between the Aboriginal people’s plight and the hypothetical of “we wouldn’t like it if that happened to our people.” The double use



of the plural pronouns “we” and “our” implies that within the student’s mind he has envisaged a demarcation between “those people” (Aboriginals) and “our people” (whites). It would appear that although this student was born in Darwin his interrelationships with any indigenous Australian was based, as he mentioned in his initial statement before viewing the film, “on what I’ve heard”, rather than any personal experience with Australia’s Aboriginals. It is not known how old he was when he left Darwin so it is difficult to make an assessment of any personal interaction, or, indeed, family interaction; this may imply that there was little or none. This is partially confirmed in his comment that “My perceptions haven’t changed” which may be interpreted in different ways and remains Ambiguous as it stands.

The following student recorded in her pre-film comments that

**C02** *they live in the bush; they lived here before white people; their [sic] black; they do dot painting and dancing; they shouldn’t be mean to white people. Their good at surviving in the bush. They should have the same rights as us because we’re all human.*

Here the student demonstrates some Basic Facts of information that she knows: “they live in the bush”, they lived here before white people”, “their black”, however, she also states that “they shouldn’t be mean to white people.” The deduction for this assumption may be drawn from scuffles and fights which occur in the northern districts between Aboriginal and white people. However, having written that, she strongly feels that “They should have the same rights as us”. Although this student separates the “us” (whites) and “them” (Aboriginals) her Generally Positive attitude is clearly shown in the last sentence with the inclusivity of both whites and Aboriginals in the word “we’re” and her mind processes

that, after all, “we’re all just human.” There is also an indication of a personal depth of understanding of the Australian Aboriginal.

The deeper understanding continues to be revealed by student C02 who writes in her post-film comments that

**C02** *They are always getting discriminated and they are very good at surviving in the bush. [In the film] the oldest child thought of her sister/cousin before herself; the hatred towards the white people; the father was covering for them; I thought it was very risky yet thoughtful of him; they carry on when things are bad; they are very protective of their children and try to save them. They don't like the white people.*

Most of the student’s comments, here, reflect upon what the film was about, rather than her own personal feelings. The closest she comes to it is the sentence beginning “I thought it very risky yet thoughtful of him” and “they are always getting discriminated”. Her comment “they carry on when things are bad” refers to the scene depicting the Aboriginal family from whom the three girls were taken. Here the director, Noyce, shows how Aboriginal people deal with grief and portrays the grandmother holding a stone large enough to fit into the palm of her hand and pounding her head with it. This scene, for many of the students, created a comic curiosity as to the unusual way of expressing sorrow. The student begins to understand the culture of family solidarity that exists among Aboriginals. This is shown in her comments that the “oldest child thought of her sister/cousin before herself” and that the “father was covering for them.” This impressed the student and although it was very “risky” for the father to take such a chance, it was very “thoughtful” of him. In fact that revealed to her that the Aboriginals were “very protective of their children and try to save them.”

In her last sentence the student states that “They don’t like the white people.” The statement may be interpreted in various ways and one of these is the literal sense of it that “They” the Aboriginals, do not “like the white people” for taking their children from their families, their culture and their familiar environment. Another would be that the student is generalizing and refers to the present Aboriginals and not those of the 1930s which was the period depicted in the film. Whichever analysis is chosen, there is justifiable cause for the Aboriginals to harbour some animosity toward the white population considering the conquest of their land, their culture and their children. This response is written in the third person, except for the penultimate sentence which begins with the personalized pronoun “I”. The student begins with some Basic Facts and positive attitudes in the pre-film comments and she remains with the Generally Positive post-film attitudes, with some depth of personal understanding which was attained after viewing the film.

Student C06 delivers her pre-film thoughts on Aboriginal people in a very different way to the other students; it is a more personalized statement of what she thinks about the indigenous Australians, whereas many other students simply list random facts or give stereotypic accounts of them.

**C06** *They, Aboriginals, play didgeridoos. We thought they couldn’t look after their children so we took them ie. the ‘Stolen Generation’. I know some really nice Aboriginal people but sometimes it worries me. Example: My mum and I were walking down the street and she made me go on the other side of her because there was about three or four drunk Aboriginal men shouting stuff about how my mum was hot and that she should go over to them. Mum just kept walking and said hello to them. She said if you ignore them they take offence and think you’re racist so it’s better just to say hello. I feel bad about the way everyone is so racist towards them but I think some things are unfair to us too. Example, if I want to study Law and there are 20 spots in the class 5 of them have to be Aboriginal, whether they got good marks or less marks than us. I think that’s unfair, that if I got better marks than them I wouldn’t get in because I’m not Aboriginal.*

The anecdotal comments C06 explain how this personal experience of the Australian Aboriginal people occurred. The parent advises the child to “go on the other side of her” sending the signal that the child might need protection from these people. The student’s comment of how “everyone is so racist towards them” (meaning the Aboriginal people) implies that she excludes herself and the mother in this regard. The understanding reaches climax in “I feel bad about the way everyone is so racist towards them”, but is immediately juxtaposed in the second half of the sentence with “I think some things are unfair to us too.” Although she reveals some Pity For the indigenous Australians and their situation, her attitudes remain within the Ambiguous area, given her statement of how ‘unfair’ it is that Aboriginal students do not equitably enter Universities. In her statement “if I got better marks than them I wouldn’t get in because I’m not Aboriginal”, she voices a sense of personal injustice which she could potentially experience as a result of the government policy in favour of Aboriginal students.

The student’s post-film comments still remain within the Ambiguous attitude although there is definite gain in understanding as a result of viewing the film.

**C06** *My perceptions of the “Stolen Generation” before were that it was devastating. I don’t understand how people could be so horrible, speaking of the “half caste” problem, as if it is an epidemic. I never had anything against the Aboriginal population but now I feel bad but not guilty. During the movie I felt upset for everything that had happened to them, and how bad it must have been for them to be ‘stolen’. My emotions are practically the same. I feel bad for what happened to them but not guilty because I didn’t do this.*

In the very first sentence the student reveals emotions of Empathy With the girls in the film when she states “I don’t understand how people could be so horrible” and refers to

the poignant simile of speaking about “the half caste problem, as if it is an epidemic.” She proceeds to relate this to herself and states that she “never had anything against the Aboriginal population” and, indeed, feels quite “bad” about their situation – “but not guilty.” Why does she not feel guilty? It is because she “didn’t do this.” Although there is a double emphasis of “I feel bad” within her statement, her emotions are “practically the same” as in her initial comments, where she also said she felt “bad” about the way people are so “racist towards them”. In her post-film remarks she is “upset” for what “happened to them” and the idea of “them” and “I” and the unfair balance between two different entities continues with the same expression of Ambiguous attitudes. Although there is no shift in her attitudes, her greater depth of understanding is revealed in her emotive use of language; this suggests some Empathy With Aboriginal people that the events portrayed in the film aroused in her.

#### **4.5 3. From Negative to Positive Attitudes with Considerable Gain in Personalized Understanding – Students: C03, C04, C07, C11 and C15**

In this category there were five students whose initial pre-film comments were Personally or Generally Negative and shifted dramatically and extensively towards attitudes that were Generally or Personally Positive. There was also evidence that these students had gained a much greater depth of personalized understanding, reaching toward and achieving Empathy With the indigenous Australians.

The opinions of C15 in her pre-film comments are particularly negative, personally and stereotypically which are expressed in the following manner.

**C15** *They live in E. P. and D. P. in housing trust homes. They steal shoes; they like alcohol and petrol; they have big noses; they don’t shower properly – they smell;*

*they hang around in packs; they eat weird food. Their generation was stolen. White people tried to breed out the blackness. They like wearing 'dada' and stuff (dress poorly). Some live in the wild. I don't really like them because they have bad body odour and they like to steal shoes. I don't like the chicks because they're skanky backstabbing hoes and none of them are pretty.*

It would appear that the student's comments are based on what she has seen and heard of some Aboriginal people within some northern suburbs of Adelaide ("E.P and D.P"). The exteriority comments that "they have big noses", "none of them are pretty" and "like wearing 'dada' and stuff (dress poorly)" are observational judgements rather than knowing the interiority of the person which requires an interaction with 'the other.' Her descriptions of the female Aboriginals are sweeping generalizations and particularly crude, in that "none of them are pretty" and she refers to them as "skanky backstabbing hoes." These are indeed derogatory comments.

It is the same with her remarks on hygiene in that "they don't shower properly – they smell . . . they have bad body odour". The only way the student would know of any "body odour" is if she passed by them at a close distance, or she simply has been told by others. Twice in her comments it is mentioned that they "steal shoes" and that they "smell". In the third to last sentence she stresses this in a personalized way by stating "I don't really like them" because of these two reasons. It is not clear how she knows that they "steal shoes" and perhaps this with "they eat weird food . . . like alcohol and petrol" are Negative Stereotyping perceptions of the Aboriginals in the northern areas. Here, again, is another student who refers to the Aboriginals as hanging "around in packs".

These comments reinforce the remoteness and lack of connectivity and understanding of the indigenous Australians. However, she does show some knowledge of the Stolen Generation in writing “White people tried to breed out the blackness” of the Aboriginals which is stated as a Basic Fact. Apart for the last two sentences which are Personally Negative and begin with the pronoun “I”, all other sentences are impersonalized and indifferent by the obvious use of “they” and “their” which distances the student from any positive emotional involvement on the subject of Australia’s Aboriginals.

The shift of student C15 towards Generally Positive attitudes for the indigenous Australians is markedly noticeable in her post-film comments below.

**C15** *Before I saw the film I had done a bit of research for an assignment and felt that the Aboriginals were hard done by getting stolen and everything. I think the white men were ignorant of the Aboriginal culture and tried to force their own culture on the Aboriginal people. I felt really sad for the Aboriginal girls because they were taken from their families and placed in unfamiliar territory. They were really brave for running away home. The white people were wrong about what they did. I feel sorry for the Aboriginals about what happened to them, but some of these think it is their right to get more than everyone else.*

The student begins with the information that she had some prior knowledge of the ‘stolen generation’ before she “saw the film” by researching for “an assignment”. She demonstrates some Depth of Understanding by recognizing that the “white men were ignorant of the Aboriginal culture and tried to force their own culture on the Aboriginal people.” Her mind has processed a significant point of understanding and then proceeds to express emotions of Pity by feeling “really sad for the Aboriginal girls” that were taken from their families. She then offers her support for the girls who ran away and were “brave” for doing so. Her judgement, this time, is that the “white people were wrong” in taking the children away from their home. Again, she reiterates a sense of Pity and feels

“sorry for the Aboriginals” and for all their tribulations. The tenor of her comments up to this point can be described as conciliatory, Generally Positive and in complete contrast to her initial statement. She liberally uses the pronoun “I” and freely personalizes her comments with an expression of Some Personal Understanding and Pity For the Aboriginals of Australia.

However, in the second part of her last sentence she states her concern that “some of these think it is their right to get more than everyone else.” This has the tendency to place her attitude more in the Ambiguous area of uncertainty. Although she has learned through the film so much about the Aboriginal population in Australia and of their suffering, there is still this doubt as to why they “get more than everyone else.” This, of course, refers to the government handouts that Aboriginals receive and the student, perhaps, is not sufficiently knowledgeable in this area and remains puzzled by why they receive handouts. Overall, the general emphasis of her post-film comments are considerably more Generally Positive, some evidence of Pity For the ‘cultural other’ and a definite deepening of Personal Understanding.

Student C04’s pre-film statement is comparatively toned down to that of C15’s initial remarks. However, both students use Personally Negative as well as Generally Negative comments. In this the student states that

**C04** *I think they are sometimes nice but sometimes not. When I’ve been around Aboriginals they smell. I feel that they don’t like us Australians because they feel we took their land/home away from them. Aboriginals have bad language and they are always swearing. Most of them smoke a lot and are almost always drunk.*



Although the student feels that the indigenous Aboriginals are “sometimes nice”, in general the rest of her comments are Negative Stereotyping, as well as Personally and Generally Negative. She has personalized her statement with the first person narrative in which the pronoun “I” features quite liberally. In the second sentence she indicates that somehow she has “been around Aboriginals [and] they smell.” She proceeds to generally write negatively in that “Aboriginals have bad language and they are always swearing” and in the last sentence “Most of them smoke a lot and are almost always drunk.” The information that “they don’t like us Australians because they feel we took their land/home away from them” is both stereotypic and factual and there is a delineation between “we” (white Australians) and “them” (indigenous Aboriginals), which reflects an indifference to the “them” when she considers the “us” as “Australians”, with the exclusion of the Aboriginals from being part of the “Australians.” These comments from student C04 are Generally Negative.

In complete contrast, the same student’s post-film comments were Generally Positive.

She now states that

**C04** *I don’t think the white people understood the Aboriginals. The emotions in the film were mostly sad, scared, loneliness. My thoughts, emotions and feelings about the Australian Aboriginal population is that they shouldn’t be taken away from their families. I think we all should have the same rights.*

The above comments reveal that the visual literary text’s meaning has influenced this student’s previously held negative attitudes to Generally Positive. In her opening sentence she does not “think the white people understood the Aboriginals”, and the use of the pronoun “I” has been distanced from the “we” white people of the initial statement above. She was able to discern the “emotions” that the film presented: “sad, scared,

loneliness” that the three Aboriginal girls experienced as characters. In this the student reveals a depth of understanding for the protagonists’ predicament and continues to express her own personal thoughts that the “Australian Aboriginal population . . . shouldn’t be taken away from their families.” The last sentence encapsulates how far she has come in Depth of Understanding with “I think we should have the same rights.” Here the student incorporates both the whites and Aboriginals in the “we” as all Australians “should have the same rights.” These Generally Positive attitudes and depth of understanding is in clear contrast to the student’s pre-film comments. It also demonstrates the power and influence of literature as a pedagogic text.

In the case of student C03, her pre-film response was succinct, thoughtful and questioned the legitimacy of some of the Aboriginals’ claims. It was stated that

**C03** *I think that Australia’s Aboriginal people have a strong faith and culture that they have and have not kept. In some ways the indigenous Australians have kept their ancestral [sic] traditions by living in the outback, using traditional equipment such as didgeridoos and ochre and telling their ancestral dreamtime stories. But in other ways they have not kept their traditions of simple traditional living and have become a part of the Western world by using alcohol, drugs and other non-indigenous things. This has become a problem in society and gives people a racist view of them. They sometimes use the stolen generation against others and use it as an advantage to get rewards etc. They blame today’s Australians for the stolen generation, but we had nothing to do with what happened in the past. Sometimes, I feel, that just because they are indigenous Australians, they get preferential [sic] treatment.*

The statement above endeavours to portray some of the positive aspects of the indigenous Australians, particularly, with regard to their culture: “indigenous Australians have kept their ancestral [sic] traditions by living in the outback, using traditional equipment such as didgeridoos and ochre and telling their ancestral dreamtime stories.” In this respect,

the student appreciates the original culture of the Australian Aboriginals, however, proceeds to juxtapose the originality of their culture with the attempts of assimilating some of the worst elements within the modern “Western world.” In this regard the Australian Aboriginal resorts to “alcohol, drugs and other non-indigenous things”. The student’s perception of this is that it had become “a problem in society and gives people a racist view of them.”

This is written in third person for the main part of the statement and by the general use of “they” and “them”, the writer, for the most part, impersonalizes her comments; she is more of an observer than someone who is interactively involved with Aboriginals. In the last two sentences she accentuates her personal opinion with the obvious use of the pronoun “I” and “we” in summarizing her stance. The issue then becomes “we” and “them”, with a clear indication that she is included within the “we” and stands in opposition to, and is being blamed by “them”, the indigenous Australians.

The indignation of the writer is aroused in that the Australian Aboriginal person uses the “stolen generation” issue to gain “rewards.” This stance is punctuated with incomprehensibility of their attitude: “we had nothing to do with what happened in the past . . . because they are indigenous Australians they get preferential treatment.” Her other concern is what she and others may have witnessed: the sniffing of petrol, drugs and alcohol abuse practiced by some Aboriginal members around shopping centres, parklands and some streets in the northern districts – indeed, also in many parklands central to the main city centre. Or perhaps she has seen it in the media. This, to the

writer, is unacceptable behaviour and has become a “problem in society.” There is no sense of curiosity as to why the Australian Aboriginals have descended to such a low level in the modern world and how it all started, nor understanding of what they have suffered and endured since white settlement. In this regard, the tone of her above statement is Generally Negative with Some Personal Understanding and thoughtful inclusion of the traditional culture of the indigenous Australian.

The post-film comments below depict a change of understanding towards the indigenous Australians as the ‘cultural other.’

**C03** *Before viewing “Rabbit Proof Fence” my views of the ‘Stolen Generation’ were of a small biased nature. From what I had heard or saw in the media or on the streets, had affected my views of Aboriginal people. I did not realize the actual repercussions that happened to the Aboriginal culture and people. I believe that after seeing RPF, the actual decrease on Aboriginal population became apparent. Their culture was intentionally almost wiped out, and over the years their culture and population has declined. My feelings and emotions were of a mixed notion during the film. I felt empathy for the suffering of the Aboriginals, anger that people could do that to another culture and sadness for the destruction of a native culture. After seeing Rabbit Proof Fence, my thoughts have changed slightly. I now understand the pain that the Aboriginals had to endure and how the white people deprived the Aboriginals of their culture and life. However, I do not believe that we should have to apologise for what our ancestors did. Hopefully we can all move on as one nation, forget the past, live the present and live in peace.*

The above student reveals a change of consciousness by admitting that her views were of a “small biased nature” before seeing *Rabbit Proof Fence*. The formation of this bias was acquired from what she had “heard or saw in the media or on the streets, [which] had affected my views of Aboriginal people” - as discussed above. It is evident that the film created “empathy for the suffering of the Aboriginals” and “anger” that the white people “could do that to another culture”. Ultimately, the student felt “sadness for the

destruction of a native culture” and demonstrates Pity and a clearer depth of understanding about the Aboriginals’ demise in a white society.

Student C03 admits to emotions of “empathy” towards the indigenous Australians after viewing the film and to a certain extent is able to place some of the sufferings of the indigenous Aboriginals in an historical context. The pain that the “white people’ caused the Australian Aboriginals over the “Stolen Generation” appears to be understood, yet history – the time lapse of the past – is often difficult to understand when it does not directly concern a person of the present, particularly, when one is young. In this case the student shows a compassionate understanding that addresses the specificity of the ‘Stolen Generation’ as a problem caused by the “white” Australians in early twentieth century, yet cannot comprehend how this has to do with the present twenty-first century white Australians who do not have to “apologise for what our ancestors did.” In this, there is still an Ambiguous attitude in her response.

However, the whole comment, above, is much more personalized than her initial statement and all but one of the middle six sentences, describing the student’s response to the film, has “I” and “my” as central to her expression. The student here uses the personal pronoun ‘I’ with a sense of subjectivity that it simply has really nothing to do with this century’s generation and certainly not with her; it is, after all, “what our ancestors did.” The student’s comment is completed with the use of the plural pronoun “we”, which from its sense in the context is, for the first time in contrast to the “we” used at the end of her initial statement, in that it is inclusive of both white and indigenous

Australians. It inculcates a sense of hope that all Australians, including Aboriginals, can “move on as one nation, forget the past, live the present and live in peace.” The tone of this response is more thoughtful, altruistic and lacks the intensity or one-sided certainty of the statement made before viewing the film. In this the student shows she has moved to a Generally Positive attitude toward the Aboriginals as the ‘cultural other’.

As with some of the above students’ preliminary comments, student C11’s remarks reveal Negative Stereotyping and Personally Negative remarks toward Australia’s Aboriginals.

She states that

**C11** *Aboriginal Australians don’t care for their appearances; they sniff petrol; theyre [sic] noses are big; I don’t like them; they run through the bush with no shoes to catch food. I have never seen a good looking black person. They get money for being black.*

Her opening words are about exteriority - “their appearances” and she qualifies it by stating that “theyre noses are big”, that she has “never seen a good looking black person” and, indeed, she affirms that “I don’t like them”. These Personally Negative comments are compounded with the Negative Stereotyping remarks that “they run through the bush with no shoes to catch food”, “sniff petrol” and “They get money for being black.” Perhaps a few Aboriginals who still live in the bush do “run through the bush” without any shoes to “catch food”, however, for this student to have attested to this particular imagery in her mind about Aboriginals, she attenuates the reality of the twenty-first century Australian Aboriginal, and especially those who reside in cities; not necessarily only those in the northern suburbs of Adelaide that are visible to the student.

The second and last comments of C11's statement have been reiterated by several other students, especially, in their pre-film remarks. The stereotypic belief that "they sniff petrol" is far too generalized to take into account the majority who do not subscribe to this practise. There also seems to be an issue with the government handouts to Aboriginals and for this specific student, she concludes that it is because they are "black." These statements, again, resound with lack of knowledge and understanding in their implicit reasons for the government's handouts to those who are most susceptible to the white people's rules and regulations. Half of the student's statement is written in the third person and the other half in the first person narrative voice which gives it both an impersonal and personal tenor and reveals the juxtaposition of the student's indifference and personal stance.

Similarly, with the other students in this category, C11's post-film comments are particularly in contrast to her initial ones. She begins immediately with reference to the film and remarks that

**C11** *Before I saw the film I had done research so I knew that the white people were mean and stole the kids. But I didn't know the lengths they would go to get the kids who had run away back. The aboriginal's religion and beliefs were stolen, not just the kids themselves. I felt really sorry for the girls and thought what the whites were doing was really wrong. I feel sorry for the aboriginals, I feel they were treated really wrongly.*

There is a palpable change of attitude and understanding of the indigenous Australian that is now most noticeable in the above comments. It is admitted that she "didn't know the lengths they would go to get the kids who had run away back." Her feelings show Pity in that she "felt really sorry for the girls and thought what the whites were doing was really wrong." In her last sentence she widens her meaning of "girls" to the inclusivity of

all Aboriginals as she simply says that she “feels sorry for the aboriginals.” The student was able to transform her thoughts and emotions after viewing the film in a noticeable shift of positivity of attitudes with a depth of Personal Understanding of all Aboriginals in general. However, the most explicit discernment of what was viewed within the film is through her extension of analysis and understanding that it was not only the situation of the stolen girls, but also “The aboriginals religion and beliefs were stolen, not just the kids themselves.” This shows sensitivity and insight to the ideas and meanings that the film portrayed. It reveals how the student’s cognitive ability to comprehend the metaphorical aspects of the film had led her to become Personally Positive and have Empathy With the indigenous Australians in her understanding of them and their culture.

Similarly, student C07 also expresses in her pre-film comments, given below, primarily, negative statements. She states that

**C07** *Australia’s Aboriginals smell; sniff petrol; don’t take - - - from people; steal socks; steal shoes; poor; smoke dope; don’t like us; got weird things; coons; niggas; flat noses; don’t use deodorant; smoke; always drunk; black; swear lots; good artists.*

As can be seen from these perceptions of the Australian Aboriginal, this student’s understanding of them are stereotypic and Generally Negative. It is written in a list format and each observational comment, except the last, is negative, such as, “Australia’s Aboriginals smell; sniff petrol; steal shoes”. This continues in the same vein, until she makes personal judgements that “they don’t like us” and “got weird things”. Exactly why Aboriginals “don’t like us” is not mentioned nor what these “weird things” are that appear to be offensive. Here it becomes probable that the student has heard these things and certainly has not any personal interaction with the indigenous Australians. Similarly,



with the names that they are referred to as “coons” and “niggas” there is Negative Stereotyping. Except for the last comment that they are “good artists”, there is no other indication that the student may have any other Depth of Understanding of Aboriginals. The tone of her writing is apathetic and that is reflective of its format and the impersonalized third person narrative, despite the fact that her last comment, “good artists” is a positive one.

In a completely contrasting manner, student C07 records her post-film transformative comments, which shift toward Generally and Personally Positive, with evidence of considerable Empathy With the Australian Aboriginal people.

**C07** *My perception of the ‘Stolen Generation’ and Australia’s Aboriginal population before I saw the film was that there were lots of Aboriginal people and they were very tribble [sic] people. For example, they were all like family. I never really had an idea on the word ‘Stolen Generation’. I just thought about Aboriginal people, nothing about being taken away. During the viewing of ‘Rabbit Proof Fence’ I had mixed emotions. I was upset, angry, sad, scared and emotions I cannot really explain. I could not believe what I was seeing. I did not think that, that could ever happen. It was a very big thing. It changed my point of view on Aboriginal people. As in the above question my thoughts did change. I feel as if they are more like us and they are not all just smelly, drunken Aboriginals. My emotions were sad. I thought about how I would have felt if that were my children that were being taken. I still do not agree that if they are not full Aboriginal then it is not right.*

The student begins with reflection on her initial perception of the indigenous Australian and that she did not know or have “an idea” about the “Stolen Generation”. She thought them “tribble people”, “all like family” and not about “being taken away.” Here the student admits to her lack of knowledge and understanding of the history of the Aboriginal people. The viewing of *Rabbit Proof Fence* arouses “mixed emotions” within

the student where she experiences Pity: “sad” and becomes “upset” and “angry”; in fact she writes “I could not believe what I was seeing.”

The impact of the visual text transforms her cognitive perceptions and finds it hard to believe that this “could ever happen.” She comes to the monumental realization that the occurrence of the ‘Stolen Generation’ was “a very big thing.” Immediately she reveals that “It changed my point of view on Aboriginal people” and her “thoughts did change.” She continues to explain how they changed and that now “I feel as if they are more like us”; she qualifies this by stating that “they are not all just smelly” and “drunken”. Again, she reiterates her word “sad” as Empathy With the Aboriginals and shows a deepened understanding of their difficult situation. Her ability to totally empathize, by placing herself in the Aboriginals’ skin and have “thought about how I would have felt if that were my children that were being taken”, confirms her transformative thoughts and new level of understanding. Although the last sentence is not clearly expressed, the student refers to the attempts of the white people to breed out the full Aboriginality of the children, in colour and behaviour and a situation which she regards as “not right.” In contrast to her initial pre-film statements of impersonalized indifference, the post-film comments are energized with the pronoun “I” and inclusive “we” which is personalized with her perception and interaction with the meaning of the film. This student’s extensive shift to a Personally Positive attitude has been elucidated to also reveal a strong depth of Personal Understanding and Empathy.

**4.6 4. Minimal or No Change in Positive Attitudes with Deepened Personalized Understanding** – Students: C13, C20, C21, C24, C26, C28, C32 and C33.

The last category of students demonstrated in the analysis of the film that their attitudes remained either Generally Positive or Personally Positive while there was a deepening of their understanding in the process. Eight students gave evidence in their comments as being positive in both their pre- and post-film statements in reply to the questions. With some variations to the choice of words for their responses, all eight students voiced their positive support and understanding of the Australian Aboriginals.

Understanding the Australian Aboriginal people, from Year Nine student C20 is recorded below in her pre-film comments as follows:

**C20** *Australia's Aboriginals have a low life expectancy; some sniff petrol; very athletic. I think they are people who need to be educated about health, hygiene and the modern world. For those who still live in the bush, I think it good that there is still aboriginals living the same way as when they came to Australia.*

This student has shown some knowledge of the indigenous people by stating that they do, indeed, “have a low life expectancy” and that some are “very athletic”. To her, it is a “good” thing that some “still live in the bush . . . the same way as they came to Australia”. However, for those who are trying to assimilate in the “modern world” they “need to be educated about health, hygiene”. This is presented as a personal opinion, but the tone of the remark is very different from other students’ mention of this same issue discussed earlier.

The student differentiates between the Aboriginals who are struggling with health, hygiene and education in the “modern world” compared to those who still live in the

“bush” in their familiar environment. Although these comments may be interpreted as having a negative undertone, in showing an awareness of the differences between these two groups and their varying needs, she writes with Some Personal Understanding and balances the choice of her words by the use of the first person pronoun in two sentences which personalizes her writing. The third person pronoun in another two sentences is insightful, albeit, written in an impersonalized manner.

Similarly, her comments after seeing the film are carefully weighed, but there is now more expression of personal emotion attached to her understanding and knowledge.

**C20** *I had a bit of an understanding to what the stolen generation was. I believe that it was a very bad thing to have done to the Aboriginals, taking their children away. The aboriginals were not like what the whites perceived them as the stolen generation tore the Aboriginal population apart mentally and physically. I felt sad for the Aboriginals when their family was apart. It seemed strange that the white people had such a bad perception of the Aboriginals, when in this century, many people would never think of people like the whites did. It's made me realise that the Aboriginal life was very hard and no one was helping them, only making it worse. I believe that there is nothing wrong with aboriginal people in Australia, and we should be helping them.*

The student begins with a very personalized account of the film. She reveals that “I had a bit of an understanding of what the stolen generation was” as depicted by the film. She is able to show Empathy With their suffering and make the judgement that it “was a very bad thing” what the white people did “to the Aboriginals, taking their children away.” Her perception is that “The aboriginals were not like what the whites perceived them”. She judges the white people’s perception of the Aboriginals, to be “bad” and considers that “in this century, many people would never think of people like the whites did” in the film. Although she refers to the plural “many people” rather than the subjective “I”, it is

clear that she includes herself in the “many people”. The very next sentence is personalized and begins with “I believe that there is nothing wrong with aboriginal people in Australia, and we should be helping them.” Here the student recapitulates her initial opinion in her pre-film comments that the Aboriginals “are people who need to be educated about health, hygiene and the modern world.” This opinion is reinforced in the processes of her mind after viewing the film that it is “we” who should be helping the Aboriginals. After all “there is nothing wrong with the aboriginal people in Australia”.

Student C20’s Generally and Personally Positive attitude toward the Aboriginals were expressed in both her pre- and post-film comments. She sees the need for the white population to educate Australia’s Aboriginals in “health” and “hygiene”; she understands that their “life was very hard” and that “mentally” and “physically” they suffered because of the unfounded white people’s actions. The student demonstrates a depth of understanding and reveals Empathy With the Aboriginals’ problems that after all, “we should be helping them.” Although these comments may be interpreted as patronizing, she does at least show concern for their situation.

As with the above student’s pre-film comments, student C28 is also brief and to the point before viewing the film. She summarizes her opinion succinctly.

**C28** *Aboriginal people I think have been stereotyped as being a leech on the government. Perhaps some are but some are really nice people.*

Her opinion is that some Aboriginal people “have been stereotyped” and she uses the personal pronoun “I” to exclude herself from such thoughts. They are stereotyped as “being a leech on the government” and here the student rationalizes that “some” may be,

but “some are really nice people.” There is a quiet inference that she is part of those who believe that there are some Aboriginals who are “nice people.” There is a pointed certainty in her words “I think” which imbues the rest of her opinion with a sense of personal positivity and Some Personal Understanding of indigenous Australians.

She continues to maintain this perspective after viewing the film, when she states that

**C28** *My perceptions of the stolen generation after seeing the film was that it was wrong to take children away from their parents and wasn't the aboriginals fault. I also think that they should try to move on a bit. I was a little annoyed about people in the class laughing at their customs. I was almost in tears when the girls were taken away! I felt sorry for not only the girls and their family but for the people who were ordered to carry out Mr. 'Devils' dirty work. I felt suspense when the girls almost got caught. I think the way it went about was wrong but they really believed they were doing the right thing! However I do feel sorry for the Aboriginal people.*

The emotion displayed in the above student's statements confirms her capacity to feel as mentioned in her pre-film statement. It is quite evident that the film has aroused her sentiments to the point of near “tears.” She also judges that it was “wrong to take children away from their parents” and that it “wasn't the aboriginals fault.” The only ambiguous statement is that “they should try to move on a bit.” It is not made explicit as to whether “they” are in reference to the Aboriginals or to the white people. If it is the Aboriginals, then she infers that they should not live in the past, but “move on”; if it is the whites then they should “move on” and have better relationships with the indigenous Australians in an endeavour to rectify the many problems. Her annoyance at some students in the “class laughing at their customs” reveals an Empathy With the ‘cultural other’. The narrative of the film arouses her emotions as she refers to the characterization

of “Mr. ‘Devils’ dirty work.” She is caught up in the suspense of the plot as the girls are tracked and “almost got caught.” Although the white people thought they were “doing the right thing”, the atrocities of what they were trying to do does not persuade the student to support the white people’s actions. In fact, she continues to express Pity and feels “sorry for the Aboriginal people.” Her support for the indigenous Aboriginals remains firm as from the outset of her pre-film statement. The film has the impact of releasing her emotions which are expressed with the liberal use of the personalized pronoun “I” and the length of her comments. In this respect, this visual text of colour, motion and dialogue awakens her dormant emotions that were unvoiced in her initial statement, to Personally Positive attitudes for Australia’s Aboriginals.

Student C13 has firmer views on Australia’s Aboriginals in her pre-film remarks than the above students. She states that

**C13** *I think that Aboriginal people are stereotyped. There is the good and bad in everything, yet when it comes to Aboriginals, that all seems to change. I also believe that people are afraide [sic] of them. For example: when writing this question, “What is your opinion on Australia’s Aboriginal people? Yet when asking about non indigenous Australians the question is not put so delicately. Why when we do something wrong, we aren’t stereotyped, yet when they [indigenous Australians] do something wrong they are – racism.*

This is a strongly opinionated piece of writing. She begins with the knowledge that Aboriginals are stereotyped; she immediately proceeds to ask the question why this is so. After all “there is the good and bad in everything”. It is of note that this student was able to detect the ‘sensitivity’ of the Aboriginal problems that beset Australia’s indigenous people. It is personally worded in sentences one and three with “I think” and “I also believe” which lend themselves to a more definite opinion. The student continues to ask

some perceptive questions which she discerns are “delicately” inclined toward Australia’s Aboriginal situation. Her main concern is the stereotyping of the Aboriginals and again she asks the leading question “Why when we do something wrong, we aren’t stereotyped, yet when they do something wrong they are”? In her rhetorical question, she also supplies the answer – “racism.” The comparison between the whites and the Aboriginals is soundly stated and her obvious conclusion confirms her more than Generally Positive attitudes with Some Personal Understanding of the Aboriginals’ plight in Australia.

In C13’s post-film comments, she proceeds with the same positivity of attitudes and strong conviction of her opinions.

**C13** *I used to view the ‘Stolen Generation’ as a sad time in our history and that we should all understand that it was a long time ago, but now I understand that it wasn’t that long ago, and that people are still suffering for it. I also understand the Spiritual connection between the people more. Sadly, I only saw the beginning, [of the film] but when they stole the girls, I felt like I was there with them. I felt like even if I was with them, I couldn’t have done anything to stop it. I understand that their culture was very different to ours, and I understand the connection better. (And that was only from viewing the beginning).*

Here the student demonstrates after viewing only the start of the film that she has grown in knowledge and depth of understanding about the indigenous Australians. She has understood that it was not that “long ago” when these events occurred and that “people are still suffering for it.” There is also more comprehension of the “Spiritual connection between the people”. Her empathy for the stolen girls is cogently stated; it was as if “I was there with them.” Although the student only managed to view the first part of the film, she was able to place herself in their skin and discern the helplessness of the situation of the stolen girls. She states that “even if I was with them, I couldn’t have done anything to stop it”, however, in her capacity as a student she understands “their culture



was very different to ours” and more importantly she understands “the connection better.” Here again student C13 compares the power of the white population with the vulnerability of the Aboriginal people, which is similar to her pre-film response where she discerned the ‘sensitivity’ of the indigenous people’s situation. Her comments demonstrate a deepening of Personal Understanding and Empathy With the ‘cultural other.’ It is quite obvious that her post-film comments are generously written with the pronoun “I” with Personally Positive attitudes and Empathy With the issue of Aboriginals as the ‘cultural other’.

In the case of student C21 she also reveals quite clearly that her empathy remains the same for the indigenous Aboriginals in her pre- and post-film comments. Her initial statement is:

**C21** *Australian Aboriginal people sometimes are stereotyped; at times violent; looked down on; seen beneath white people (untrue). I think Australia’s indigenous people are seen as the lower race and are sometimes stereotyped as violent and that they never own real homes. Aboriginals are seen as beneath white people, a few aboriginals.*

This student has chosen to write about the indigenous Aboriginals with regard to their standing in a white society. In her opinion they are stereotyped as “violent” and as people who are unable to “own real homes.” They are then seen, in this stereotypic manner “as beneath white people” which the student considers as “(untrue)”. She does not elaborate on her views and how or why she thinks this is “(untrue)”, however, her statements leave no doubt that she has Some Personal Understanding of the Aboriginal people’s plight, because of these stereotypic ideas that pervade the white society.

Here the student reveals the stereotypic white people's attitudes in which they regard the social status of the indigenous Aboriginal as "beneath white people". She reiterates "beneath white people" twice, rephrases the same meaning as "seen as the lower race" and "looked down on". There is one particular sentence in which she personalizes her thoughts with "I think" and this contains the sentiment that the white people regard the Aboriginals as "the lower race". However, the key to her statement is the parenthesized word "(untrue)". Here she indicates that all these stereotypic comments are not inclusive of her opinions of them. It remains to conclude that this student has better than Generally Positive attitudes toward Aboriginals in her pre-text comments.

After the student has viewed the film she underpins her initial opinions when she writes that:

**C21** *My perceptions of the Stolen Generation before I saw the film was that it was something that happened long ago and that the whole subject wasn't really very interesting. Now I really enjoy learning about the 'Stolen Generation' and how due to the white people's mistake, a whole generation suffered. People were poking fun at the Aboriginal women at the start of the film because she was pounding her head with a rock which really made me a bit upset at the class. R. and I felt during the film very emotional and we felt a little annoyed at some of our peers at their disrespect. I feel very sorry that a whole generation was lost trying to get rid of people's Aboriginality.*

Here the student demonstrates how through the viewing of the film she has learned "about the 'Stolen Generation' which she now "really enjoy[s] learning about" and the "white people's mistake" in taking away the Aboriginal children. She empathizes with a "whole generation [that] suffered." Her ability to understand the 'cultural other' and their very different beliefs and mannerisms is empathically expressed in her comment that she and her friend R. felt "a bit upset at the class" where "People were poking fun at the

Aboriginal woman . . . because she was pounding her head with a rock”. Student C21 “felt during the film very emotional and we felt a little annoyed at some of our peers at their disrespect.” It is evident that the student’s sensibility was piqued with a deep understanding and Empathy With other people’s cultures which she acquired through the film and class discussions. This strengthened her initial Personal Understanding with Generally Positive attitudes that demonstrate she acquired Empathy With the indigenous Australians by viewing *Rabbit Proof Fence*.

Student C24 also reveals in her initial comment below a Personal Understanding of the indigenous Australians in an analogous manner to the previous student. She states that

**C24** *Australian Aboriginals have different cultures – religion. They were the first people in Australia; used traditional herbal medicines. They are just like us and the only difference is the colour of their skin. That shouldn’t make a difference. They are human beings to.*

She acknowledges here that they have “different cultures [and] religion.” This is elucidated by stating the fact that “They were the first people in Australia; used traditional herbal medicines.” Above all, the important statement is that this student considers the Aboriginal people to be “just like us and the only difference is the colour of their skin.” The use of the word “us” is inclusive of both white and black Australians. To this end she considers indigenous Australians as “human beings” and that the colour of their skin “shouldn’t make a difference.” She faults them with no particularities and looks at the big picture: “They are human beings” – like “us”. These Generally Positive statements are liberally dispersed within her pre-film comments.

Her response to the post-film questions reflects her initial opinions with added emotive acquisitions. The following are her statements:

**C24** *They were people who where [sic] discriminated because of there skin colour; hate, loathing, discust [sic] sorrow. Haven't seen all [the film]. They are people, they always have been people and always will be people.*

In both responses, before viewing the film and after seeing part of it, she inculcates the importance of the indigenous Australians as “human beings”, “people”. The emotions elicited from the student whilst viewing the film are: “hate, loathing, discust, sorrow.” She does not expand on these inner feelings, but tersely lists them in a compounded manner. There is brevity to her writing which suggests that the main issue for this student is that the indigenous Australian must be considered as a “human being” just like everyone else. She reveals Empathy With Aboriginals in a Personally Positive attitude toward them. This is strongly projected in both her pre-film and subsequent statements, which concur with her personal stance on Aboriginals as Australian “human beings”.

There is also a continuity of a deepening of understanding and positive attitudes in both the pre- and post-film statements of student C26. She records in her pre-film comments that

**C26** *Australia's Aboriginals believe in the Dreamtime; their stories are their heritage. Often there is a lot of racism towards them; they have the ability to run fast. There [sic] stereotyped around places like D.P that they are all ferals but its just a few of Indigenous Australians that act indiscreetly, but a lot of them, and I know, that they are not all bad, because I live in D.P and I have had experiences with Aboriginals and the majority that I have met are nice.*

The student's statements demonstrate Some Personal Understanding of the Aboriginal people with a mixture of factual information. This reveals that some, indeed, do “run fast” and they do have “their stories” in “Dreamtime” which are part of “their heritage.”

Her assessment of the indigenous Aboriginals is that there is “a lot of racism towards them” and they are stereotyped as “ferals.” The student dispels this notion by immediately explaining her own Generally Positive “experiences with Aboriginals and the majority that I have met are nice.” She claims that it is only “a few of Indigenous Australians that act indiscreetly” and they should not be stereotyped because of a few who behave inappropriately in public. Her personal “experiences” have helped this student to form positive attitudes founded in the understanding of the indigenous Australians.

Her post-film response confirms her first statement and demonstrates the advantages of her “experiences” with the Aboriginal Australians and the understanding she gained at school about them.

**C26** *My opinions and perceptions on the Stolen Generation were mainly pity and sadness for the Aboriginals, and towards the whites anger and a general feeling of “why did you people do this to them? How could you do this to them? I felt a genuine feeling of sadness for the three girls being taken away from their mother. The scene when they were first taken is almost nightmarish, as well as the scene when Grace was captured. The intense feeling of loss and love in the movie was almost overpowering. I got really involved in the movie on a mental and spiritual level. My perceptions and feelings about the Aboriginal population and people didn’t really change at all, because I think I have been well informed about Aboriginals in my schooling. But I did feel like I had been informed of quite a few things.*

It is of note that this student refers to some specific scenes that she viewed and the impact of those scenes were the emotive notions of “intense feeling of loss and love”, as well as “nightmarish” and “overpowering.” She also experienced, “towards the whites”, a sense of “anger”. The intensity of her emotions whilst viewing the film cognitively ignites her mind to ask “Why” and “How” could these people have done such atrocious things to the

Aboriginals. This is compounded with a sense of “sadness” and pity. In the end, the student’s “feelings about the Aboriginal population and people didn’t really change at all”. The student felt well informed at school and indeed about “quite a few things”. This interpretation takes “things” to mean the ideas and messages acquired from viewing the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*. The student remains confidently persuaded in her Personally Positive attitudes and Empathy With the indigenous Aboriginals.

The pre-film statement of student C33 reveals understanding and positivity towards the indigenous Aboriginals, which is also sustained within the post-film comments. Her first response begins with:

**C33** *I think that the Aboriginal people have been wrongly titled as ‘Drunken skumbags who take their privlidges [sic] of being indigenous too far.’ I play netball with people who have an aboriginal background and they are the opposite to that. I think it’s wrong to judge them just because of some crimes other aboriginals might have done. I believe that people should get to know them before saying things about them and calling them names because of their background. Because in the end – they are far from bad people.*

These strongly worded remarks leave a reader in no doubt of where the student’s understanding and attitudes lie. As with student C26, she too has actually experienced and interacted, first-hand, with other Aboriginal people. In this instance playing sport, netball, has given student C33 the opportunity for Personal Understanding of the Aboriginal as the ‘cultural other.’ She immediately rejects the notion of how other people regard the Aboriginals who “wrongly” denigrate them as “‘Drunken skumbags who take their privlidges of being indigenous too far.’” There is an indignant tone in this statement and she rebukes the negativity that abounds toward the Aboriginal people. Her sound suggestion is for people to “get to know them before saying things about them and calling them names because of their background.” The certainty with which she makes

her remarks is borne in her actual experience with the Aboriginals. This first-hand interaction gives her a Personally Positive attitude to dispel the negativity towards the indigenous Australians which pervades some white people. The key point is that “people should get to know them” before making judgement.

In this sense, she continues to gauge her own judgement after viewing the film in a similar way:

**C33** *My understanding of the stolen generation before I saw Rabbit Proof Fence was that the Stolen Generation was when the aboriginal children were taken from there [sic] mothers and placed in foster care or in a white environment. While watching the film I thought a lot of sorrow towards what happened to the aboriginals. I realized how wrong it was what the white people did. They were visitors to the country and the Aboriginals were the natives and to do what they did. No one should be taken from the environment where they were happy and placed into one which made them confused and depressed!! I feel very sorry for them and now I understand why some of them are depressed and alcholics [sic]. I realize what they went through and how they were once happy and now they are sad. I feel they are not to blame. If we (white people) perceive them as bad people who live off the government and drink alchohol [sic] or sniff chemicals it is our fault, Not theres [sic].*

The student here demonstrates Some Personal Understanding of the ‘stolen generation’ before she saw the film. After viewing *Rabbit Proof Fence* her comments reveal a sense of “sorrow” and Pity that she felt for the Aboriginal people. She condemns the white people’s attitude towards the indigenous Australians as “wrong”, after all, they are “visitors to the country and the Aboriginals were the natives”. The white people’s actions were to remove the Aboriginal children from an environment that was “happy and placed into one which made them confused and depressed!!” She accentuates this sentence with a double exclamation mark to stress its importance. The student’s ability to comprehend the whole impact of this situation is expressed with some cognition as to “why some of

them are depressed and alcohoholics. I realize what they went through and how they were once happy and now they are sad.”

The ability to acknowledge the past and recognize the present and the reality of some of the Aboriginals’ circumstances reveals this student’s capability to cognitively employ a rationale and reach an empathic understanding. The student concludes her statements with her own decision that she feels “they are not to blame. If we (white people) perceive them as bad people who live off the government and drink alcohol [sic] or sniff chemicals it is our fault, not theres [sic].” This is indeed a cogent and confident assessment that the student makes of the problems that have beset the Australian Aboriginals. She demonstrates a Personally Positive attitude toward them. Although her initial statement before viewing the film was a positive one, where the indigenous Australians were “far from bad people”, it is apparent that the film has influenced her with clearer evidence to support her views which she reiterates in her post-film statement as a deepening of Empathy. This is a very strong display of positivity of attitudes towards the Australian Aboriginals by this student.

There are some similar thoughts and opinions with the previous student’s comments in the way Student C32 expresses his understanding and positive attitudes toward the indigenous Australians. The following are his pre-film comments:

**C32** *I think Aboriginals can be good people but some are still upset about the government. So I suppose the Aboriginals I know are good because they are from a younger generation. I think they may be a bit too reliant [sic] on the government.*



Student C32's comments reflect Some Personal Understanding in similar ways that other students have voiced in their statements. He feels that Australian Aboriginals are "too reliant [sic] on the government." This government hand-out procedure also, of course, occurs within the white population which the student's rationale has not quite processed. However, in spite of "people still upset about the government", student C32 continues to surmise that Aboriginals of "a younger generation" "are good". The specific reasons for this are not known overtly, perhaps the "younger generation" is not prone to be "reliant on the government" and he sees hope in this generation to be self reliant rather than depend on government monetary hand-outs which the student tacitly implies is not the right thing to do. This student states that the "Aboriginals I know are good" and this Personal Understanding and positive attitude may very well be gained from playing sport with young Aboriginal boys. It is known that student C32 is very much involved with sport. Irrespective of the "government" situation, this student's personal experience with young Aboriginal people has been Personally Positive.

This Personally Positive attitude towards the Aboriginal people continues to be expressed in his post-film comments.

**C32** *Originally I thought that the government were taking the children away to kill the Aboriginals off further. They first justified it as conquering so this was just another way to justify it. I didn't know much about the stolen generation at first and didn't know the 'whites' thought it was for the Aboriginals 'own good'. I was hoping through most of the film that the three girls would make it back to their family. I was also a bit annoyed and angry when the 3 split up. My thoughts emotions and feeling are the same as they have always been. I still think of each Aboriginal the same. I don't think the 'Stolen Generation' affects today's generation of Aboriginals as much as most people think.*

There is an implication of injustice in this student's perception of the 'Stolen Generation'

in that the government endeavoured to “justify” their actions by killing Aboriginals, firstly as conquerors and secondly as thieves by “taking the children away to kill”. His emotions are of “hoping . . . that the three girls would make it back to their family”, a “bit annoyed and angry when the 3 split up.” There is an underlying defensive attitude toward the vulnerable and attempts to reveal this through the emotional reference to being “annoyed and angry”. Nevertheless, his emotions and feelings are the “same as they have always been” which reflects the sentiments of his pre-film statement that the “Aboriginals I know are good”.

The length of his post-film comments and the multiple use of the pronoun “I” demonstrate the affect and impact of the visual text. His personal experience with the younger Aboriginals also gives him the confidence to show Empathy With the “Stolen Generation” which does not “affect today’s generation of Aboriginals as much as people think.” In this opinion he reveals a sense of hope and an understanding of the young Aboriginal people who have had some impact on his Personally Positive attitudes toward the Aboriginals of Australia.

#### **4.7 An Explication of the Printed Text - *Urgent***

After the film had been shown and discussed, the class studied the printed text *Urgent* (2003), edited by Leanne Rowe, which reveals the life and artistic talents of an Aboriginal man, Albert Thompson. This printed text was studied as a reinforcement of the thematic issues in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*. The study of the text *Urgent* also revealed how much students were influenced by the film in knowledge and understanding

of Australian Aboriginals. As previously mentioned, Albert was, at the age of four, one of the 'stolen generation'; later in his adult life, this memory was compounded by events which resulted in his three daughters being removed from him, as their father. This text is a personal explication from Albert, his daughters and general family members who endeavour to reunite after many years of separate lives. Albert's abundant artistic abilities are exposed by Dr. Jason Fitzgerald. One of Albert's lyrical poems expresses his loneliness and depression of a friendless life and the emotional response of being separated from his daughters. The untitled poem, below, is a reflection of his personal sentiments, struggles and solitary survival without a family.

The Storm had arrived

Leaving my withered branches fruitless and bare  
 No soul, No remains.  
 Just me.

One last touch of the smooth face, so innocent.  
 One last glimpse of their smiles, so true.  
 No laugh, No life.  
 Just me.

A lifetime removed in seconds  
 A generation in bloom  
 Nothing left but my bare hands  
 And me

The seeds that have fallen have grown,  
 Unaware of what could have been,  
 A seed created has drifted, away with the wind,  
 And me.  
 A reconstruction of events through my head,  
 A better solution in hand,  
 A dream that never subsided,  
 A dream of my daughters and me.

By Albert Thompson

(Rowe 2003, p. 24).

The researcher's observations of the discussions around this poetic text with the Year Nine students revealed a deeper understanding of the problems that this Aboriginal man suffered and more importantly the reasons for his demise. As Love states, the subject of English is concerned with "social justice and morality" (Love 2001). In the third stanza, for instance, the interpretation is ambiguous in that it can refer to Albert, himself, who was taken away from his family or the daughters who were removed from him. The first line of that stanza "A lifetime removed in seconds" demonstrates the removal from someone well known, such as his parents or the untimely removal of his daughters from him. Either way, Albert had "Nothing left but my bare hands/And me". He details that this all happened at a time "When a generation in bloom" was in the initial years of growth and signifies that Albert or his girls' youth was snatched from his life. The repetitive words of "Just me" or "And me" denotes the desolate loneliness of his existence. The analogous comparison between Albert's 'stolen generation' experience and the extraction of his young daughters from his life become inextricably painful memories for him. The students analysed the poem with empathy, insight and cognitive appreciation of this succinct autobiography, which is wracked in suffering, hardships and dire isolation.

Experiencing empathy, the students need to understand the image formed in the mind and the emotive heart which is stimulated by the mood created in the author's text. In the first verse Thompson uses a metaphor of "withered branches fruitless and bare". This image, of course, refers to himself who is stripped of family and left him with "No soul./ No remains./ Just me." The metaphoric image is powerful enough to create a lonely, sad

and solitary picture, which the students experience through Albert Thompson's words as their own – affective in the heart (Willis 2008). For this to occur, it requires imagination and to this Vygotsky writes that “both imagination and realistic thinking are often characterised by high levels of affect or emotion” (Vygotsky 1987, p. 348).

Therefore, the students were able to perceive, more readily, the repercussions of being stolen at the tender age of four and how this could lead a man to become incapable of reconstructing his life for a positive future. The trauma of his formative years formulates inexplicable adult behaviour which leaves a stigma on his culture and his manhood. It was Dr. Fitzgerald's discovery of Albert Thompson's artistic works in a large envelope that made possible the compilation of the text *Urgent*. This fortuitous find enriched the students by providing a deeper level of understanding of why some of the indigenous Australians resort to drink, drugs and insouciant behaviour.

As there were no written data for this text, the researcher jotted notes of the student's attitudes towards Albert Thompson and his many defects of character which were analysed and discussed in class. One of these defects was due to his alienation from his three daughters and his inability to motivate himself to search for them, now quite grown up young women. The Pity For Albert and some of the Empathy shown enabled the students to reflect on the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* and compare Albert's situation with the three 'stolen' girls. Unfortunately, Albert Thompson died before he could reunite with his daughters. Dr. Fitzgerald's angst was whether he should write to his girls and if he did what he would say to them. This dilemma was put to a vote and three fourths of the

class wanted the doctor to write to Albert's daughters. One of the stronger reasons the students voted in favour of this was that family is an important aspect in life and the daughters should know about their father: first, that their father had died and second what type of man he was. Especially, it was important to reveal his artistic talents to his daughters and generally to the nation.

It is of note that the students considered the significance of family values in light of Znanicki's *principles of solidarity*, within the collectivist family. In Albert Thompson's Aboriginal family environment, he would have experienced and shared such collectivist values where there was full acceptance of him, as an individual who contributed to the solidarity of family as a whole in a specific community. Contrastingly, in a white environment, Albert's experience becomes confusion, rejection and alienation. Most students showed Empathy With Albert and/or his daughters and stated that they, personally, would want to know who their father was – whether he was dead or alive. More importantly, the students gained a greater understanding of the repercussions of the 'stolen generation' and were able to cognitively reason that much of Albert's decline and eventual demise was due to being taken away from his original Aboriginal family at the age of four.

From the perspective of Vygotsky's theories of Psychology it is apt to look at the *spontaneous* and *scientific concepts* of what Albert had learned during those formative four years of his life. The informal learning of home's environment became the *spontaneous* values gleaned by Albert. These 'pre-existing values', are brought to the

formal school setting and are developed into what Vygotsky terms *scientific concepts*, as in the case of Albert's natural talents in literature and art.

In reading Dr. Fitzgerald's medical notes on Albert, the students easily discerned that the psychological traumas of being taken away from his familiar family environment left unhealed scars which expressed themselves in ill health by smoking too much, drinking too much. Moreover, he experienced racist attitudes from the white population, when going to the hospital for medical treatment (Rowe 2003). Albert's solution was to refrain from attending the hospital and this, of course, led to further medical complications of his condition. The students were, generally, more receptive to the 'cultural other' after studying *Urgent* and the views expressed in the classroom discussions revealed a Generally Positive attitude toward Albert Thompson. His hardships, through the journey of his life were more readily and deeply understood with the pre-existing knowledge and attitudes the students acquired from viewing and in-depth studying of the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* (Rosenblatt 2005, p. 33).

The conclusion to this study of Year Nine responses demonstrates that all the students experienced a shift in attitudes and or a deepened understanding toward Australian Aboriginals as the 'cultural other'. The tendency to "identify with the experiences of others is a most precious human attribute" (Rosenblatt 2005, p. 37). Naturally, there was variable positivity of attitudes within this cohort of Year Nine students. It is of note that the visual text *Rabbit Proof Fence* influenced the students to cognitively process what the students personally knew and what they learned through the film and pedagogic

discussions around this visual text. Through the study of the literary text *Urgent*, the students' attitudes and understanding were reinforced positively by the discourses in the classroom. It is difficult to precisely place each student in a category which defines exactly his or her positivity in attitudes and depth of understanding of the 'cultural other.' Each student is an individual who perceives and expresses his/her point of view in a unique and complex manner as was articulated in their oral responses to *Urgent* and written comments on *Rabbit Proof Fence*.

#### **4.8 Theory Connectivity to the Data**

The range of cultural meanings given to Aboriginal peoples within the Australian community generally is reflected in the attitudes expressed by the students before they viewed the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Many articulated the particular monocultural values to which they had been exposed up to that point. As the majority of the students had minimal personal exposure to the indigenous Australian population they tended to stereotype Aboriginals. The students' post-film remarks were then an indication of the extent to which they had responded to the film text's multicultural values, which portrayed Aboriginal people in very positive terms and highlighted the sufferings and losses they had endured.

Following Znaniecki's insistence that personal statements "already belong to somebody else's active experience" (Znaniecki 1969, p. 137), the researcher recognised each set of collected data as "exclusively" the student's own, and ultimately connected to his/her social and cultural environment. In their comments the students reveal that their social



and cultural environment is monocultural and afforded very little or no experience of other cultures. Student C29 states that he “Didn’t know any aboriginals” and most other students’ comments were based on distant observations of groups of Aboriginals that congregate around particular shopping centres and suburbs in the northern districts; many recorded basic facts that “they’re black” or have “dark skin”. The active and conscious individual’s experiences are an accumulation from many individuals’ experiences. In this regard, the students’ personal data are formulated from the experiences that have agglomerated over the course of time. Each student’s experience or lack, thereof, of the Aboriginal ‘cultural other’ is reflected in his/her recorded data. This is clearly demonstrated in the students’ initial remarks about their knowledge and opinion of the indigenous Australian, which often consisted of many negative perceptions (Znaniiecki 1969 [1934], pp. 19 & 137; Dulczewski 2000).

The statements of some of these students indicate one way in which the situation of Aboriginal peoples touched them personally. They expressed their resentment toward government policy which, since the 1970s, gave Aboriginals advantages that other lower socio-economic students did not receive. To highlight this, one student was concerned that “if I wanted to study Law . . . [and] I got better marks than them [Aboriginals] I wouldn’t get in because I’m not Aboriginal” (C06). Another reiterates similar sentiments that “because they are indigenous Australians, they get preferential treatment” (C03). Similarly, in the Ambiguous grouping of students, they profess a positive comment only to be contradicted with a negative one and in their post-film data they conclude that their “perceptions haven’t changed” (C19), or “I still think the same about them” (C09). It is

apparent that the students' personal 'self-interest' is at stake and in their individual assessment they see government policy as unjust, where the Aboriginals are "ungrateful and they get more privileges than whites." (C01).

There are, however, a few students who have actually experienced 'the cultural other' in a sporting venue or club, such as, student C33 who states "I play netball"; and a couple of other students who do not specifically state how they have interrelated with the Aboriginal culture. Student C26's experience is through her specific suburb, because "I live in D.P", where numbers of Aboriginal people live. It is also known to the researcher that this particular student is very active in a church youth group and participates in various charitable organizations, which may bring her into contact with Aboriginal people. Student C32 knows the "younger generation" of indigenous Australians, and although he does not state where his interaction takes place, since he is an avid sportsperson, it is highly likely that his contact with "younger" Aboriginal people is made at sporting venues. These three students, all of whom reveal Personally Positive attitudes in their pre-film comments, demonstrate that the presence of the 'cultural other' in an individual's cultural experience is pivotal for recognition and acceptance of cultural difference.

However, there were eight students in all who revealed positive attitudes in the pre- as well as their post-film data. This fact reveals a glimpse of five students who had achieved these positive attitudes toward Aboriginal people without direct personal interaction with any. Given the connectivity between the values of a group and the

attitudes of individuals (Znaniecki, 1969), this finding would suggest that these five students were exposed to values which were positive toward Aboriginal people before the study began.

Within the monocultural reality of mainstream Anglo-Australian culture, there are important subcultural variations related to socio-economic backgrounds, rural/regional environments, religious affiliations, political or ideological view points, interests, sports and leisure pursuits. In relation to Aboriginal people, there are very clear differences in values or cultural meanings to be found within mainstream Australian society. Some of the above groupings regard Aboriginal peoples in very negative ways; others are unsure, seeing both good and bad elements in them. At the other extreme are those who strongly uphold the human rights of Aboriginal people and point to the abuses, deprivations and sufferings they have endured at the hands of European settlers and their governments. The teacher/researcher's knowledge of these students suggests that they were associated with church groups which gave positive meanings to Aboriginal peoples.

In the sociological theory of *values and attitudes* as defined by Thomas and Znaniecki, there is connectivity between the values of a group and the attitudes of individuals which are dependent upon each other. If researchers are to understand people's actions, they must include both "the objective cultural elements of social life and the subjective characteristics of the members of the social group" (Znaniecki 1969, p. 69). Both need to be taken into account within a situation. The situation includes the objective conditions which involve the totality of the values that consist of social, economic and in, this

instance, educational contexts. The individual students are social values, in the classroom context with their own personal attitudes to the cultural values in the school. The English language and the English texts then form not only a source of linguistic and literary, but also other cultural values, such as the multicultural values which are of interest to this study. The students as individuals and as a group interact with these values which are then expressed in a subjective attitudinal manner through their written comments on Aboriginal people. As indicated in Chart 4.1, their attitudes ranged from Personally Negative to Personally Positive.

In most of the students' post-film statements there is reasonable reassessment of pre-existing attitudes. In particular students C04, C07, C11 and C15 experienced the greatest shift in Positivity of Attitudes to Personally Positive and Depth of Understanding to Empathy With the 'cultural other', once they had been exposed to the multicultural values, in the film, which were supportive of and sympathetic to Aboriginal people.

These students initially stated that Aboriginals "smell" (C07), "almost always drunk" (C04), "sniff petrol" (C11), and "hang around in packs" (C15). Their transformed attitudes became Personally Positive and Empathy With in their Depth of Understanding. The processes of their mind exposed to multicultural values led to a reassessment of their pre-existing attitudes. Now student C04 feels that "we all should have the same rights"; student C07 understands that "they are more like us"; student C11 states that the "aboriginal's religion and beliefs were stolen, not just the kids"; and student C15 comprehends that the white population "tried to force their own culture on the Aboriginal

people”. Znaniecki posits that the situation can be modified either by a change of conditions and exposure to new values or by a change of attitudes, or both (Znaniecki 1969, p.110; Dulczewski 2000). In this instance the students’ attitudes and depth of understanding changed through the in-depth *aesthetic* study, as Rosenblatt’s theory indicates, of the visual text and class discussions which focussed on the multicultural values portrayed in the film. This enabled the students to form a *transactional experience* of the ‘cultural other’ through the filmic and written texts. The students’ interpretations and meanings of the texts create changes in attitude, as processed in their *imagination*, which reveal that “alongside the images that are constructed in the immediate cognition of reality, man constructs images that he recognizes as part of the domain of imagination” (Vygotsky 1987, p. 349).

These Year Nine students, with little or no cultural experience outside their own group, demonstrated that changes in attitude are possible with the aid of the study of literary texts and specifically, in this case, the visual text in which they encounter multicultural values. The data analysis on understanding the ‘cultural other’, presented in Chart 4.1, shows how the students begin the process of adjusting their attitudes by including the Aboriginal culture as part of the Australian reality.

The post-text comments from many of the Year Nine students showed that experience is possible through the in-depth study of literary texts, be they visual or written. How the literary text can be studied as a *transactional experience* in an English classroom is expounded in Rosenblatt’s theory of *aesthetic reading*. The visual or written text, which

involves in-depth reading and interpretation of such literature, enables the students to comprehend the text and evaluate its meanings. The elucidation of these meanings depends much on the students' cultural environment, and the pre-existing monocultural values they bring to the analysis and understanding of the text. For example, in the students' pre-text statements the students' comments were, primarily, negative. Student C12 states that "they [Aboriginal Australians] should try and deal with us [white Australians] and befriend us." Similarly, student C23 refers in his comments that Aboriginals "have big noses", "Known as coons" and "called petrol sniffers". Many other comments from students had similar negative connotations.

However, after the students' involvement with the meanings of the texts that entailed an emotive and intellectual *transactional experience* between reader and the text, the post-text comments were considerably more positive toward the Aboriginals as the 'cultural other'. Student C11 states that she "really felt sorry for the girls and thought what the whites were doing was really wrong." Similarly, student C07 wrote that "I feel as if they are more like us and they are not all just smelly drunken Aboriginals." There were many other comments from the students that reflected these positive attitudes. This demonstrates how the *transactional experience* transforms the cognitive processes as the imagination plays-out the students' literary experience. As Rosenblatt states, "The transaction with any text stirs up both referential and affective aspects of consciousness" (Rosenblatt 2005, p. 33). All the senses are utilised to draw from the text cognitive meanings which are formed in the mind as imagination. Thus, the experience between

text and reader, in this instance, creates better understanding and more positive attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’.

For the students to understand and appreciate the Aboriginal as a ‘cultural other’, it is necessary to also comprehend their psychologic mind and what the imagination has processed from the information learned. In this regard, the cultural psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s theory of *mediation* is productive of ‘higher mental processes’ (Vygotsky 1997), and he paid particular attention to *semiotic mediators*, such as, works of literature which act as ‘psychological tools’ and “directs the mind and behaviour” (Vygotsky in Kozulin 1990, p. 115). Here for this investigation, it is evident that literature, specifically the visual text (film) and *Urgent* are *semiotic mediators* for the student’s ‘higher mental learning’. Indeed, language either spoken or written is considered by Vygotsky as the most important semiotic tool for the knowledge and development of students and humanity in general. The language within the film and its visual context enabled the students as “participants to coordinate their actions in relation to the object in view” – the film (Wells 1994, p. 3). The coordination of their actions was to view the visual text, analyse its content and formulate meanings from its socio-historic relevance. Then, there follows a discussion with the teacher/researcher and peers concerning the relationships between the understanding gained and the actions involved in processing the new emotions experienced in relation to the impact of white settlement on the Aboriginal people and specifically the ‘stolen generation’.

Another way of comprehending what the students understood about the ‘cultural other’,

psychologically, is to look at how their emotions or feelings are developed in the mind. Vygotsky gives explanation of the student's experiences in the relationships between people as an *interpsychological* category, and then within the child's mind as an *intrapsychological* category (Kozulin 1990; Daniels 2003). Once the students have intrapsychologically formulated the ideas in their mind's imagination, they are able to assess the situation in articulate speech or written work which express their meanings. As an example, the interpsychological relationship between the film, the literary text *Urgent*, student and teacher within the classroom aids the student's understanding of the multiple meanings in the text so that intrapsychological processes begin to take shape within the student's mind. A child's development is based on relationships that can foster learning, whether it is in the playground, home (*spontaneous concepts*); or in the formal setting of a school classroom considered as part of the (*scientific concepts*).

Vygotsky argues that there are four features in the *scientific concepts*: generality, systemic organization, conscious awareness and voluntary control. The first two features distinguishes the concept as 'scientific' and it is "not so much the fields to which they apply as the way in which they relate to experienced 'reality' (Wells 1994, p. 1). One of the main issues in this investigation is the white people's government policy which regarded it appropriate to steal the identity of Aboriginal children. The above features can be applied in this research as an 'interpsychological' relationship with the students. The *systemic organization* of a formal presentation of the film, as mediation, leads to the multicultural view, that all cultures are equally valid. The post-film discussions and analysis with the teacher/researcher and students, around the text (Love 2005), lead to a



*conscious awareness* appropriated within the minds of the students as an intrapsychological process of what the film, as a *semiotic tool*, means to each student.

There is some disparity of meaning for most of the students after reflection on what was learned and understood about the film; the *voluntary control* expressed in their written post-film comments is variable. One student, C07, stated that “I feel as if they are more like us and they are not all just smelly, drunken aboriginals”; and another student C01 remarked “I thought it was pretty sad” and then contrasts this with “they still get more privileges than whites, but I don’t think the “Stolen Generation’ should’ve been taken from their families.” One of the reasons that there are so many different levels of meanings among the students’ post-film comments may very well be what Vygotsky terms as *spontaneous concepts*; these constitute the students’ every day informal “ad hoc” (Wells 1994) experiences which are different for each of them. These experiences have become part of the student’s thinking and development which were received in a relatively more casual environment, such as, the home. In contrast, Vygotsky sees the instructional formality of school, mentioned above, as linked to *scientific concepts*. Both *spontaneous* and *scientific* elements are a part of the students’ learning and are expressed in different controlled thoughts and actions in various contexts.

#### **4.9 Conclusion of Chapter Four**

It is clear that the theories used in this Year Nine study proved useful in interpreting the data. Having established the students’ monocultural environment within the multicultural society of Australia, the researcher investigated how far the students could gain

knowledge and experience of the 'cultural other' through the literature studied in the English classroom. Rosenblatt's theory enriches the method of learning a literary text through *aesthetic reading* to gain in-depth understanding and meaning of the author's words and images. For this to be accomplished, the students are required to experience the fullness of feelings elucidated from the text as a *transactional experience* between reader and text. This experience becomes a personal journey in the individual's mind aided by the literary text and what Vygotsky terms as a *semiotic mediator*.

The visual and written texts act as *semiotic mediators*, firstly as an *interpsychological* experience and then with the internal transference, the knowledge and ideas are *intrapsychologically* formed within the mind as imagination and meaning. The positive meanings that the students gain within their mind are transformed into speech communication and written statements, which give expression to their *higher mental development*, in shifting from *spontaneous* to *scientific concepts* as evidenced in some of their post-film data.

This analysis of students' comments provides evidence of the personal journey in the imagination undertaken by these students from a monocultural environment toward a Positivity of Attitude and Depth of Understanding of the Australian Aboriginals. It seems that the literary texts have had the power to give the students an imaginative experience of what, for them, is a new cultural environment. For many of the students this experience has triggered psychological processes which have led to positive changes in attitudes and levels of understanding of indigenous people as the 'cultural other'.

## **Chapter Five: Year Ten Study – Short Story of an Italian Immigrant Family in Australia**

### **5.1 Year Ten Students and Explication of the Short Story**

This Chapter investigates nine Year Ten students who graduated into the same class and continued to be together through to Year Twelve. The aim of researching these students was to find out to what extent a growth occurred in their positivity of attitudes and understanding toward the ‘cultural other’ over their Year Ten studies of literary texts. In the Year Ten stage their written responses concerned Italians as immigrants in Australia and as the ‘cultural other’. As a teacher/researcher with a commitment to cultural understanding, it was hoped that the positive trajectory of change seen in the previous chapter would be maintained. However, it was necessary to remain open to all possibilities: some students could remain stationary and others revert to more negative positions.

The research took place in the English classroom at the same Independent College as the previous year. Many of the students from the previous year were allocated to other Year Ten English classes according to their choice of additional subjects and timetable. The students were primarily from main stream Anglo-Australian backgrounds, except for two students, one whose family came from Italy and another from ‘white’ South Africa. Of the nine students who participated in this investigation three were male and six female. As can be seen, once more, the class represented a monocultural Anglo-Australian environment.

The teacher/researcher embarked upon a study of a particular literary text for this year level, which took approximately seven weeks, in one term of four forty minutes class lessons per week. Within this time frame the text was read, discussion occurred in class and literary techniques were identified so that the students could attain a deeper understanding of the author's meanings. During Year Ten, the students studied texts which reflected the life experiences of Italian immigrants in Australia. The teacher/researcher felt it was important to examine a different type of text other than the visual and poetic texts which were addressed in the previous chapter. In this instance it was a short story entitled *Identity* by M.S. Dalis which dealt with the arrival of an Italian family to Australia and their new life in this country. An explication of the short story text is given below to make clear what the students were responding to, in answering the specific questions.

The short story was set in Melbourne with the arrival of post-war immigrants in 1955. The Martinelli family consisted of the father Mario, his wife Francesca and their son Giovanni. At their disembarkation, the Port Officials endeavoured to change Mario's name to a more simplified Anglicized version. He categorically refused, unlike some of the other passengers who accepted their new names. Mario worked incredibly hard as a labourer in factories or anywhere he could find work to support his wife and son.

Giovanni, their son, achieved academic excellence and attained a degree in Law which enabled him to work as a solicitor for an old established Melbourne firm. In the mean time, he legally changed his name to Jonathon Martin for simplification of pronunciation

and assimilation within the predominant Anglo-Australian society. More and more he became estranged from his parents, old acquaintances and the Italian culture which they still upheld. Ultimately, he married his senior partner's daughter whose family connections and history in Victoria were the epitome of what might be called the 'aristocracy' in Australia. From this marriage ensued a daughter, Annabelle, whose charm and loveliness reflected her father's physiognomy and more particularly her paternal grandmother. Her mother contributed to her gentle fine manners, general social etiquette and brilliant blue eyes.

It was easier for Jonathon to keep his family and business life private separate from his parents who would not understand this new life. He did, however, visit every month and left a healthy cheque for both of them. It was his way of saying thank you for everything they did for him and to ease his conscience. His visits were short, impersonal, yet polite. Although, he convinced himself this was sufficient loyalty and duty, it pained his father, Mario, to see the chasm grow between them year by year. It was not until Annabelle's sixteenth birthday party that the truth of his actions and life were revealed as an epiphany. Jonathon met for the first time his daughter's boyfriend, Robert. When he asked Robert for his surname, his daughter intervened and replied,

*"Oh, daddy, it's Castonelli. Robert's father is Italian, you know." Jonathon sat on the easy chair by his pool and watched the two young people, who were obviously very fond of each other, swim and play around in the water. In that quiet, personal moment of time and in the collective depths of his mind a lifetime flashed by him. He was unaware of the wry smile on his face (Dalis 2005, p.4).*

The dramatic irony was not lost on Jonathon; the fact that his daughter was quite happy

to accept a boyfriend from an Italian background became a reminder of what he had endeavoured to avoid, by rejecting his ethnic culture.

The above were the essential elements of the short story. The teaching approach, initially, was devoted to a preamble of what is a short story in comparison to a novel. As mentioned above, the importance of grounding the students in the literary techniques of a short story enabled them to identify with the author's style of writing and implicit meanings. One important aspect of the style and format of a short story was to learn that the suspense needed to be retained throughout the plot since the climax is revealed a lot earlier in a short story than a novel or novelette. The style of writing was succinct with the introduction of characters and context introduced almost immediately at the start of the story. An understanding and appreciation of these points were essential as the students were going to write their own short story later in the term.

Similarly to the last chapter's methodology, the Year Ten section of the investigation implemented a pre- and post-short story compilation of student written data based on the reading and analysis of the prescribed short story text. Prior to the commencement of reading the short story, it was necessary to gauge from the students, what they knew about Italian immigration to Australia. The students were, therefore, asked to write comments under the heading: "All that I know about the Italian Immigrants in Australia." It soon became apparent that there was limited knowledge on this subject and for some students it was necessary to allow them to write on "The General Immigration to Australia." A few students wrote about their own parents or close relatives' emigration

from their country of origin in Great Britain or Ireland; one particular student wrote of her Italian family's immigration.

After reading the short story, the students were asked for a more lengthy response based around three questions:

1. What does the title of this short story mean within the narrative? What does this mean to you personally?
2. What would you do in a situation like this? Explain fully.
3. The ending is rather reflective. What do you think has happened at the conclusion of the story? How would you react if you were Jonathon?

Comparisons were made, below, between the pre- and post-short story data on the students' knowledge and understanding of the Italian immigrant fictional characters in the narrative. Of particular interest were the students' knowledge and understanding expressed in their comments on the characterization of the protagonist, Jonathon. The students' comments are in *italics* and the researcher's analysis of their remarks follows.

Within the researcher's analysis of the students' written comments, there is much reference to their words and ideas, as presented by them; this is to support the analysis and make clearer the explication of their implied or explicit meanings. The students' comments are presented verbatim with spelling errors, inconsistencies, colloquial language and grammatical inaccuracies. The researcher's comments, again, are primarily in the present tense.

There is a pre-short story Graph 5.1 and a post-short story Diagram 5.1 which summarizes the Knowledge and Understanding, respectively, of both sets of students' comments. Throughout the analysis of the students' data, there is mention of the descriptors for both the Graph and Diagram to assist in determining the students' Knowledge and Understanding of Italians as immigrants in Australia. There is also use of the descriptors from Chart 4.1 where it is deemed applicable. Where the descriptor terms are used, their first letter is capitalised. Importantly, the students' data are connected to the sociological, educational and psychological theories which are used to interpret their written remarks.

## **5.2 Year Ten Data on Short Story** – Students: C01, C02, C03, C12, C13, C15, C19, C21 and C29

The analysis of each student's Knowledge and Depth of Understanding begins with the Year Ten class whose knowledge of Italian immigrants in Australia is compared to their post-short story comments after studying the text, *Identity*. Student C01's pre-short story statements are as follows:

**C01** *I do not know a lot about Italian Immigrants, but I do know a little bit. Italians who have migrated to Australia have brought their strong culture to Australia. Now Italian food has almost become part of the Australian culture, such as, pasta and pizza. Most Italians who migrated to Australia used their resources very well, such as starting potato farms and olive groves. Most of these Italians are very rich, go to good schools and have nice two storey houses. The Italian culture is very strong and they have kept it strong whilst living in Australia.*

*My father was an immigrant from England. He and his family consisting of, his father (J.B), his mother (D.B), his older brother (G.B) and his older sister E.B) traveled [sic] to Australia over 30 years ago. I am unsure of how they traveled to Australia. When my father's family arrived in Australia, they did not have much money and they had to work hard to get money. They first lived in a hostel with a few other families. My Grandad worked long hard hours as a butcher while my Nana worked and looked after her children. My Nana soon became pregnant and*



*gave birth to my father's younger brother (S.B). My father's family mixed in well with everyone and now they have many friends and have established a wonderful life.*

The above student demonstrates some knowledge of the Italian immigrants in Australia and overall reveals a positive attitude toward them. She considers their culture as “strong” and their contribution, through their “Italian food has almost become part of the Australian culture, such as pasta and pizza.” The student is also able to identify some of the work that she thought the Italian population has undertaken in Australia, “such as starting potato farms and olive groves.” Although the mention of “potato farms” is somewhat surprising, it is possible the student was thinking of market gardens. According to the student these jobs have yielded rewards whereby the Italians are now able to send their children “to good schools and have nice two storey houses.” Within this paragraph the word “strong” is used three times which reinforces her view that the Italian culture has been maintained in Australia, is “very strong” and not only that, “they have kept it strong”. The implication here may be that communities of Italian populations have been discerned by the student as remaining within their own culture and associating with each other which defines them as the ‘cultural other.’ Overall, the associative conscious awareness of the Italian populations in Australia, according to this student, indicates that she not only has Some Knowledge (see Diagram 5.1) of Italian immigrants in Australia, but is positive towards them.

The personal comments about her own family who emigrated from England “over 30 years ago” reveals some of the hardships which they endured, where “they did not have

much money and they had to work hard . . . [as well as live] in a hostel with a few other families.” Of significance is the last sentence of the paragraph where the student states that “My father’s family mixed in well with everyone and now they have many friends and have established a wonderful life.” Here the student points to the complete assimilation of her family within the Australian culture with “many friends” and an “established . . . wonderful life.” The student, of course, does not mention that the dominant language of English in Australia is also that of England and the similarity of cultures between these two countries is much more evident than between Italy and Australia.

However, the student’s post-short story response identifies closely with Jonathon, the protagonist in the narrative, *Identity*, and she proceeds to answer the questions as follows:

**C01** *I think it means that the identity of Giovanni/Jonathon is confused. He’s not really sure whether he is Italian or Australian. I think its about the change of the name, does it change the past, the person the authenticity of the person? I’m not sure but I think that’s what its about. I think that he shouldn’t have changed his name to Jonathon because he should be proud of his heritage.*

*If I was in his shoes I would keep the name Giovanni Martinelli because I would love to be Italian. As I said earlier you should be proud of your heritage and your family.*

*I think he was thinking about how ironic it was that his daughter brought home an Italian after he tried so hard to get away from it.*

Here, the student interprets Giovanni/Jonathon’s confusion with his “identity.” She endeavours to rationalize the “change of the name” and questions, “does it change the past, the person the authenticity of the person?” She answers her own question, initially, by being uncertain, “I’m not sure”. This uncertainty changes to a more defined and

definite answer “that he shouldn’t have changed his name to Jonathon because he should be proud of his heritage.” The student empathizes with the character, Jonathon, while not approving of his action and states that “I would keep the name Giovanni Martinelli” because it is important to “be proud of your heritage and family.”

The student’s final remarks are insightful and in *Interpreting the Story*, she is able to identify irony as the literary technique used by the author. In this, her Understanding of what Jonathon has done to his parents in the renouncement of his original family culture, with which she does not agree, tends to inform the reader that student C01 is in favour of multiculturalism in Australian society and her attitude towards it is to “be proud of your heritage”. Her inclination is a Generally Positive attitude toward the Italian ‘cultural other’ with Some depth of Understanding of someone who has a different cultural background, although there is no indication that she has had personal experience with the Italian culture, even though she would “love to be Italian”. It is almost a romantic idea rather than the reality of what it is like to be an Italian immigrant in a society that does not speak your language; understand your culture or readily accept it. Although, the student writes about some of the hardships her father’s family had to endure, before becoming economically independent, they were able to assimilate into the Australian culture more readily than Giovanni’s family; after all the student’s family spoke English from the outset, whereas the Martinelli family within the story, still associated with their expatriate Italian friends during Mario’s birthday party many years after immigrating to Australia.

Although some members of student C02's family were immigrants to Australia, similarly to student C01, their identity is drawn from the Italian culture not the English. The student's pre-short story comments on immigration are as follows:

**C02** *I do know that my grandparents who are Italians arrived in Australia in 1940 because they wanted to escape the war. It took them a month to arrive in Australia by boat.*

*I also know that many Asian people arrive in Australia and they come here illegally. They want to escape their horrible life they live in or need a change of life style, but many of them don't have passports and are forced to be kept at detention centres.*

The student's remarks in the first paragraph that her "grandparents who are Italians arrived in Australia in 1940". The other information that she supplies is the reason for this immense move from Italy to Australia in that "they wanted to escape the war" and that it took them "a month to arrive in Australia by boat." These comments are just generally Basic Facts that this student knows of her grandparents. There is no Personal depth of Understanding and the tone of her writing is Implied and even indifferent. The absence of emotive choice of words may suggest that she is defensive in her attitude by not going deeper with an explication of her Italian background. Perhaps it signifies her desire for assimilation with the Australian culture, or, at least, her wish to be seen as such?

It is of note that in the second paragraph about "Asian people [who] arrive in Australia", there is slightly more information than on her own Italian background. There is also more emotive language than in her previous paragraph. She knows that they "arrive in Australia . . . illegally" and then provides something of a sensitive answer as to the

reasons for their situation. Student C02 states that “They want to escape their horrible life they live in or need a change of life style”, but they “don’t have passports and are forced to be kept at detention centres.” The linguistic choice of “horrible” and “need” prefaces a sense of urgency and understanding for their plight. Similarly the usage of the word “forced”, may imply duress stress placed upon the Asian boat-people. This piece of writing is in direct contrast to her first paragraph which suggests Implied Knowledge of Italian immigrants to Australia with no sense of personal commitment to her Italian background.

The responses to the post-short story questions, by student C02, were more brief in content than the pre-short story comments on Italian immigrants to Australia.

**C02** *“Identity” fits in with the story because the father changed his name so he could be easily remembered.*

*I wouldn’t ignore my father and I would thank them.*

*He had a heart attach [sic] while watching his daughter and boyfriend swim.*

It is obvious that the above scanty replies to the three questions, on the short story *Identity*, do not directly comment on the character Jonathon, nor reveal any explicit understanding of the author’s ironic meaning. However, they do hint at a deep personal response to the story. In the first comment, the title of the short story *Identity* does, indeed, “fit in with the story”. The student makes no mention of any underlying reason for it – not, so much for the name, “to be remembered”, but rather to erase any connection to Jonathon’s Italian background. Perhaps this student may sub-consciously be attempting to also change her identity and assimilate, but without the change of the surname.

In the second remark, she disagrees with Jonathon's actions in distancing himself from his father and the student states that, "I wouldn't ignore my father and I would thank them". This suggests an in-depth personal understanding of collectivist Italian family relationships and how to maintain proper filial contact with her father. However, she did miss the section where Jonathon also thanks his parents when he visits them "once a month, leaves money and goes" (Dalis, 2005, p.3). Here, the student may consider this as too formal and perfunctory which may be an insulting way of ignoring them. This indifferent attitude of Jonathon's toward his parents is unacceptable to the student, but, she does not elaborate on her own answer, and shows No Understanding of or identification with the character's guilt and subconscious behaviour.

As for the third question, the student's answer reveals that she has not understood what the researcher takes to be the meaning at the end of the narrative and she offers a very Different Interpretation of the story's ending. Her estimation that Jonathon "had a heart attach [sic] while watching his daughter and boyfriend swim" can be seen as an unexpected interpretation and she offers no explanation for this decision. On the other hand, it could also mean that she is interposing her own in-depth understanding of the serious consequence which this sort of intercultural relationship could have in an Italian family. Perhaps she is thinking of her own father and how he would react if she brought a non-Italian boyfriend home.

Overall, her post-short story remarks lack cognitive depth of Understanding of the

narrative's meaning of the main character to the reader. It can be construed that in interpreting the narrative, the student lacks the enthusiasm and inquisitive mind to delve deeper for the answers which may disturb her pre-conceived idealism of her own Italian situation. Her answers were incomplete, even superficial and she missed the point of the story. Whatever the reasons, it would seem she simply did not feel comfortable discussing this in the Anglo-Australian context of the school.

Unlike the above student, C03's response to the pre-short story question was more about her family's emigration from Ireland, than Italian immigration to Australia. The student begins her statements with her family's experiences in Ireland and Australia.

**C03** *My mother immigrated to our Australian colony 37 years ago. Her[sic] and her mother, father and 9 brothers and sister immigrated to Australia from Ireland due to the danger of the politics, discrimination and prejudicity [sic] between the Catholics in the North of Ireland and the protestants. The fights between both grew stronger and more prominent and it became too dangerous for my grandmother and grandfather to raise 10 children in such a hostile and frightening environment. They were sponsored by someone and immigrated to E., South Australia. They had to stay in hostels with other immigrants. Life, at first, was extremely difficult for them, as they were teased and found it hard to become familiar with the hot, dry and barran [sic] conditions Australia provided.*

*I do not have much knowledge regarding the immigration of Italians to Australia. I presume that they immigrated due to either hostile conditions or difficulties they experienced in Italy.*

The student chose to write about her maternal family's immigration to Australia and the reasons for this momentous move. It is of note that the student refers to Australia as "our Australian colony" inferring that it is still a "colony" and part of the British Empire. This indicates the close historical and cultural connection of Britain and Australia in her thinking; and by association demonstrates the dominant Anglo-Australian culture in which the students reside at school, home and in their environs. The student's description

of the political unrest and revolt between the Irish Catholics and Protestants are clearly indicated in her writing. Ultimately, this becomes the reason for their immigration to Australia to avoid the “hostile and frightening environment” where “politics, discrimination and prejudice” led to “the fights between both [and] grew stronger and more prominent.”

As with student C01, this Irish family also stayed in “hostels with other immigrants”, and their “Life, at first, was extremely difficult for them, as they were teased”. What they were teased about is not made clear, but it is implied that their life was “extremely difficult for them” only “at first”. The other difficulty was to try and become familiar with Australia’s environment of “hot, dry and barren [sic] conditions”, which are a complete contrast to the green and moist Irish countryside. Nonetheless, assimilation with the Australian culture was made; the commonality of the English language would have been an advantage compared to the Italian immigrants that came to Australia.

The student’s “knowledge regarding the immigration of Italians to Australia” was very limited. A presumption is made that they came to Australia “due to either hostile conditions or difficulties they experienced in Italy.” Here, unlike student C01, there is no recognition of the Italian culture in Australia in any way or form.

However, the student’s post-short story analysis identifies strongly with the character of Giovanni and his Italian culture, when she states the following:

**C03** *The title of this short story within the narrative means that the character Giovanni is trying to find his true identity and inner self, and does not know who/what*



*family he belongs to, what culture and race he belongs to and who he is as an individual. Identity to me means who you are, it's what you are and how you act.*

*In a situation like Giovanni's I would not change my identity, but change my ways of living and life. No matter where you live, who you live with and how you live, you cannot escape who your family are, and where they come from.*

*At the conclusion of the story Jonathon realizes that he cannot escape his true identity and his true self, family and culture. If I were Jonathon, I would think that someone is trying to tell me something and that I should make contact with my parents and old identity.*

On the topic of identity, this student, also, reinforces the importance of finding “true identity and inner self”. If this is not achieved the student surmises that the character Giovanni “does not know who/what family he belongs to, what culture and race he belongs to and who he is as an individual.” Her personal interpretation of identity is “what you are and how you act.” Furthermore, the student asserts, “I would not change my identity”. If a person, such as Jonathon did, it would come back and haunt him. Indeed, the ending of the story and its moral meaning, for this student, is that Jonathon “should make contact with [his] parents and old identity.”

The student's message to remain faithful to one's original culture is admirably suggested, which also attests to her own Irish Celtic culture. However, what the student shows is no appreciation of Jonathon's Italian background which is vastly different in comparison to the Irish. Certainly, some of the early white settlers in Australia were Irish immigrants endeavouring to avoid the hardships of hunger, religious and political persecution. Historically, therefore, the Irish are woven into the Australian fabric from the outset of white settlement, where political and social decisions were developing in this new colony; indeed the student still refers to Australia, today, as a “colony”. It almost implies

that it is an inherent right to be in this country as an Irish immigrant. This is certainly not the case with Italian immigrants in Australia who have been historically regarded as foreigners. Nonetheless, over the many decades of Italian immigration into this country, there has been a softened attitude of acceptance toward them, in particular their influence of unique culinary tastes upon Australian eating habits, mentioned by some of the students. The student's positive attitude toward the story's character, Jonathon, shows that she has Some Understanding of the Italian culture, but has not gained any real Appreciation of Italian family issues in Australia as the 'cultural other'.

As with some of the other students, student C12 chose to write about general immigration to Australia, rather than specifically addressing Italian immigration. His comments are as follows:

**C12** *The only thing I know about Italian Immigrants is that they came here in a boat.*

*My grandparents and my father arrived to Australia from England in 1972. They went on a journey over the ocean in a large boat.*

*Illegal immigrants are people who come to Australia without permission. Most of which come from Asia. They are sent to an Asylum centre, which is like an animal's cage. The illegal immigrants came to Australia to escape a life that they did not want, a life without war, a life where their children could grow up and get an education.*

This student, as so many of the other students, knows very little about Italian immigrants in Australia. There is Basic Fact in his statement "that they came here in a boat." There is also minimal knowledge of his grandparents' life as immigrants from "England in 1972." Again, they too travelled "in a large boat" and journeyed "over the ocean" to arrive in Australia. Perhaps there were no significant difficulties and his English family settled comfortably in the Australian culture. There does not seem to be any inclination

on his part to divulge anything of his family's life before or after arriving in Australia. The assimilation with the Australian culture could have been so seamless for the family, that a young boy who was born some twenty years later may not have ready information to supply. The tone of the first two paragraphs is impersonal and lacks emotive linguistic selection with Limited Knowledge of the Italian culture in Australia.

In contrast, the last paragraph is quite informative about the Asylum boat people "from Asia". Here, he colours his words with emotion and uses a pertinent simile to describe the disgraceful conditions into which these "illegal immigrants" are placed in an "Asylum centre, which is like an animal's cage." He continues to show sympathy for these boat people and gives positive reasons for them making their illegal entry into Australia. It is "to escape a life that they did not want, a life without war, a life where their children could grow up and get an education." This information could have been easily elicited from the media, since the arrival of boat people was and is a very current and controversial issue. Television as a medium is very popular with students, as is the internet and then there is also the classroom discussions in English and other subject areas. However, his personal persuasion is Generally Positive toward these Asylum seekers that enter the shores of Australia.

In specific answers to the post-short story questions on *Identity*, student C12 responds in the following manner:

**C12** *The title of this story 'Identity' means that the story is about how a person's identity is changed. To me personally it means that a person's identity is very important and should not be changed against your will.*

*I would have helped Mario figure this out. I would stay with him and thank him.*

*I think Jonathon had died at the end of the story.*

The student's sparse comments above reveal, overall, that he regards the identity of a person as "very important and should not be changed against your will." By stating this he also infers that the protagonist, Jonathon, should not have changed his name or rejected his original Italian culture, thus, changing his identity. In the story it was not "against [Jonathon's] will"; it was, in fact, an act of will on his part to purposefully change his identity. Here the student's comments suggest that he did not quite connect with the underlying meaning of Jonathon's actions. It is of interest to note that this particular student's Different Interpretation of the short story's ending may have been influenced by C02 who sat together with C12. Both, also, arrived at similar conclusions about the ending of the story, in that, Jonathon "had a heart attach" [sic] and student C12 believes that "Jonathon had died". Their Different Interpretation of the ending of the short story is recorded in Diagram 5.1. Whether this is coincidental or whether they had talked about the ending together, neither shows any comprehension of the irony.

The support for "Mario", who is Jonathon's father, is wholeheartedly stated; the student "would stay with him and thank him." Here again, as with some of the other students, he shows no appreciation for Jonathon's cultural predicament and sense of disadvantage as an immigrant in a predominantly Anglo-Australian society. Jonathon's immense desire to assimilate is so great that nothing is allowed to stand in its way. As the student has not experienced a dilemma such as this, it is difficult for him to empathize with the main

character, Jonathon, and his need to be accepted as totally Australian. This shows that the student has No Understanding of the Italian culture as it exists in Australia.

In the student's last statement, there is a misinterpretation of Jonathon's demise "at the end of the story." This may be because he did not pay attention to the moral of the story, or simply lost concentration and made a wild guess. Therefore, it is difficult to analyse any further, other than to reiterate that the student shows some sympathy for the plight of "Mario", the father, and disengages himself from "Jonathon's" personal reasons for changing his identity. The dramatic irony escapes the student whose Different Interpretation does not allow him to Understand Jonathon's moral dilemma.

Similarly to the students above, student C13 also avoids writing about Italian immigrants in Australia – there is very little or No Knowledge about this. However, one aspect of her own immigration, as a child, to Australia is described in some detail.

**C13** *The only information that I am aware of on the subject of immigration is that I, myself, am an immigrant. To be perfectly blunt, I thought that the correct word for a person legally traveling to a country to live was Migrant. I was under the impression that only those fleeing their country illegally to live in another were referred to as immigrants. Although this is the correct word to use, I personally, do not like this title, as it seems cold. Even though I was too young to remember my journey here, as I was only an infant at the time, I still carry with me a mark that all who are immigrants to Australia at least wear. The mark-like scar is a relatively small circle on my fore-arm. At the center of this scar the skin is white like paper, even when my skin is sunburn, and the surrounding tissue is a pink outer ring. This is the place where I was vacinated [sic] against disease before entering Australia. Many precautions like this are taken before being allowed to live in Australia.*

Here the student writes about her experiences as an immigrant child coming to Australia.

She states that she was "young to remember my journey here, as I was only an infant at

the time”. Although she does not recall any intimate experiences of the “journey” she carries “a mark that all who are immigrants to Australia at least, wear.” It is a “pink outer ring” on her “fore-arm” which is the area where she “was vaccinated against disease before entering Australia.” Not even when she gets “sunburn” does this mark disappear and she will wear this mark forever. The detailed description of the “scar on the skin” sparks metaphorical images of cattle being branded to ensure to whom they belong. Be that as it may, it is of importance to note that the student’s opening sentences relate to her understanding of “immigrant” and “migrant”. Although she acknowledges that “immigrant” is the correct word, she states that “I, personally, do not like this title, as it seems cold.” The implication here may be twofold: one, being an immigrant can have a “cold” experience and two, one can “carry” a “mark” as an immigrant forever.

The particular memory of the student reveals an act which surfaced subconsciously and acknowledged in great detail. The imagery presented through the linguistic choice of the student’s writing is personal as seen in the abundant use of the pronoun “I” and the tone is laboured when she states “I still carry with me a mark” and “all” immigrants coming to Australia “wear” this mark. This “mark” may personify the immigrant’s status in Australia – that of being different from other Australians. However, she reveals No Knowledge in her pre-text comments of Italians as Immigrants in Australia.

The same student’s post-short story comments reveal some insights into the identity of the protagonist. She states the following remarks:

**C13** *The title creates a moode [sic] for the story, the title is the main grab point of the story. To me it means mystery and action, then it could also mean some one who is lost.*

*(I honestly don't know. I'd buy them something shiny). I suppose I'd miss everyone that I've left behind and I'd acknowledge the sacrifice my family has made and I would do my best to help them in any way. I might be afraide.[sic] Afraide to show my past to others. Afraide that they might judge me. If I did I might try to hide my past or forget it, which would be wrong.*

*History repeating itself. Similarities between people he knows. He wants to make peace with his parents.*

In the first paragraph of the student's comments above, she rightly identifies that the title of the story *Identity* "creates a moode" [sic] and that it is the "main grab point" within the narrative. Personally she thinks the title of the story "means mystery and action", but more to the point it means "some one who is lost." When the student is asked what would she do in a situation like this, she responds with "I honestly don't know." However, she continues to explain that she would "miss everyone that I've left behind and I'd acknowledge the sacrifice my family has made" and also "help them".

The last part of the paragraph, the student uses the word "afraide" [sic] three times. The reasons that she would be afraid is "to show my past to others" and "that they may judge me". As an immigrant child, this student is able to more readily empathize with the character Jonathon and can sense why he was afraid to reveal his "past to others". One of the reasons that the student offers is that "they may judge me". She relates to Jonathon as an immigrant, because she too is an immigrant in Australia. She finds it plausible to see herself in his shoes, and in his situation. It is not made explicit as to who "they" are that "may judge" her, however, in accordance with the short story, Jonathon's fear was to

expose his past to the Australian society to which he so desperately wanted to belong. It is presumed, therefore, that it is the same implication for the student. The last two sentences of the paragraph are most telling as the student hypothesizes that “if I did I might try to hide my past, or forget it.” Here the student is visualizing that this may also be possible for her, as for Jonathon, and to “forget” her past. Although the student does not overtly state that she has experienced a similar situation, she shows a depth of Some Understanding for Jonathon’s plight and would not condemn him, even though, in her judgement his actions “to hide any past or forget it” is “wrong”.

The student sees the ending of the story as “History repeating itself”, in the sense that the protagonist, Jonathon, recognizes the “similarities between people he knows”, which reveals the student’s Appreciation of Family Issue, with Some Understanding of Italian Culture. The similarities in this case is the Italian culture that both his daughter’s boyfriend, Robert, and he share – Robert is overt about it, Jonathon conceals it. Whether the ultimate lesson that Jonathon learns is “to make peace with his parents” is not made explicit in the story, however, it does imply that in his recognition there may have been another way. On the other hand, before his own daughter and Robert’s generation, life would have appeared very different for an immigrant, such as Jonathon, in Australia.

The next student’s knowledge of Italian immigrants in Australia is written in her pre-short story comments with some emotive selection of words. She states the following:

**C15** *My knowledge about the Italian Immigrants is very limited. The only thing I know for a fact is that the Italians migrated to Australia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I also know that when they arrived here, they spoke very little English and in some cases not at all.*



*The Australian people didn't except [sic] these immigrants and hardly made any effort to. To Australians, Australia was there [sic] country.*

*The Italians, to travel to Australia not knowing what was going to come their way, and in that point were very brave.*

Student C15 shows some Limited Knowledge of Italian immigration to Australia and she has written with some insight and sympathy. Although some Italians did arrive “in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century”, the majority emigrated from Italy post World War Two. That “they spoke very little English and in some cases not at all” was quite commonly the case. She continues to mention that the “Australian people didn't except [sic] these immigrants and hardly made any effort to.” In this point the student also feels that they were regarded as foreigners and that “Australia was there [sic] country”. She is able to address the unknown on arriving at a destination that is unfamiliar and unexpected. These travellers to Australia “were very brave” to journey thousands of miles away from their Italian homes and arrive in a place called Australia, whose people spoke a language they did not understand.

The above student reveals an empathic tone in her writing and demonstrates Some Personal Understanding with a positive attitude toward the Italian immigrants. Their predicament in a new country was made more difficult with the lack of knowledge of the English language and the complications of not being readily accepted into the Australian society. The student's comprehension of this attests to her ability to show a Depth of Understanding toward the Italian immigrants as the ‘cultural other’.

The student continues in her post-short story comments to address the issue of identity in the ‘cultural other’ as an important topic. She states as follows:

**C15** *The title means that the character changes his identity completely. This means to me personally that if you don't like who you are you can always change your identity even though your parents don't want you to. If I were in Giovanni's situation I probably wouldn't of [sic] changed my identity because family is really important and if you changed your name you might disrespect your parents and they might disown you. Or if I did do it (change my name) I would try and work it out with the family.*

*Jonathon met his daughter's Italian boyfriend and he started to remember his own boyhood and he saw himself in the boyfriend.*

In the first paragraph the student identifies the complete change of identity for the fictional character Giovanni to Jonathon. It would appear that the student has made the discovery, through the short story, that if a person wishes to change his/her identity it is possible with or without parental permission and in this, there is some tacit understanding as to Giovanni's change of identity. Although she acknowledges that this is possible, in her opinion she “wouldn't of changed” her identity “because family is really important.” The student feels it is not right to show “disrespect” towards “your parents” because “they might disown you.” However, the student shows Appreciation of ‘identity’ as a Family Issue and suggests that if she did change her name, she “would try and work it out with the family.” The student endeavours to project some empathy with, the character, Giovanni's situation and perhaps if it were necessary to change one's identity, it would be important to liaise with “the family”. The student's writing, here, is reflective of her comments in her pre-short story remarks where she identifies some of the hardships that Italian immigrants face in coming to an unknown destination, to an unknown language and to a reception by “The Australian people” who found it hard to accept these immigrants in “there [sic] country”.

The student's answers in the last paragraph, regarding the conclusion of the story, shows that she is able to connect with the character, Jonathon, who identifies with his daughter's Italian boyfriend and "remember[s] his own boyhood" as he sees "himself in the boyfriend." Although the student does not identify the literary irony, or answer the last part of the question in this paragraph, she does reveal insight to Jonathon's psyche and reflects what might be his thoughts as he watches his daughter and her boyfriend swimming in the pool. In this the student demonstrates Some Understanding of the Italian culture in Australia.

Unlike the student directly above, student C19 offers no information regarding Italian immigration to Australia. These are his pre short story comments:

**C19** *I do not know anything about the Italian immigrants. I do not know about this due to the fact I have never come across this issue within my lifetime. Also another reason may be that I have never known of this issue and so I choose not to follow up on this due to the fact I was unaware of this fact.*

The student seems to be at a loss to write on anything that he may know about Italian immigration to Australia. As he states he has "never come across this issue" and "was unaware of this fact." Within the above paragraph, he states four times that he has "never known of this issue" using different words to state the same meaning. As he does "not know anything about the Italian immigrants" to Australia, this reveals his insular involvement in a monocultural environment. Although it is known to the researcher that a handful of students at the school did come from an Italian background, it is obvious that, at least to this student, their original ethnicity was never made public at school, or outside of its environs. It is also indicative of the strength and influence of

monoculturalism in the areas where he lives, that the student finds it hard to conceive of the issue of Italian immigrants in Australia. Thus, the student reveals No Knowledge of Italian immigrants in Australia.

After the short story was read and discussed, the student answered the questions relating to the narrative as follows:

**C19** *The title of this short story means that Giovanni changes completely, he changes his identity completely. This means to me personally that it's disrespectful to do that to your family unless it's necessary.*

*If I were in his situation I would try to sort it out with my family because without my family I wouldn't be able to live.*

*I think that the conclusion was that Jonathon thought back on his life and remembers his family and what they done for him. I think that Jonathon's reaction will be to go talk with his father.*

The student identifies how “Giovanni changes completely . . . his identity” and continues to offer his own personal opinion. As with some other students’ assessment, this would mean “it’s disrespectful to do that to your family.” However, the student does recognize also the possibility that it may be “necessary” to do so. In this, he reveals an understanding that to be an immigrant in Australia, the hardships are so great that it necessitates the person to take drastic measures and change “his identity completely”.

When the student is asked what he would do if he placed himself in Giovanni’s situation, his solution is a conciliatory one. He writes that “I would try to sort it out with my family”, because he “wouldn’t be able to live” without his family. A few of the students mention similar sentiments as C19 and it is construed that the students might find it difficult to place themselves in Giovanni’s shoes after he has become an adult. He

changes his identity as a young adult after he completes university. The students at this stage are, approximately, fifteen years olds and it would be hard to visualize life without a supportive family, or use their imagination as a transformative mode into a twenty-four year old who has graduated from Law.

The family value is also reiterated in the final paragraph where the student concludes that “Jonathon thought back on his life and remembers his family” and that he would “go talk to his father.” There is emphasis on the importance of resolving family disputes and reconnecting with the original past. In this he shows some Appreciation of the Family Issue, but No Understanding of Italians as the ‘cultural other’.

Similarly to the above student, C21 expresses her lack of knowledge about Italian immigrants in Australia and states the following:

**C21** *I do not know anything about Italian immigrants in Australia. I do not know very much about the Immigrants in Australia in general. I know we are a very multi-cultural nation and many other cultures have had a real influence on our food and ways of life.*

Not only does this student know, specifically, “anything about Italian immigrants in Australia”, but she also does not “know very much about Immigrants in Australia in general.” However, unlike the other student directly above, she is able to offer knowledge that Australia is a “very multi-cultural nation” and that these cultures have influenced “our food and ways of life.” There is no expansion on this statement, but she is able to express her awareness that, indeed, there are “many other cultures” in Australia, which is a step further than the previous student’s pre-short story comments. She reveals some Limited Knowledge of Italians who have immigrated to Australia.

In her post short story comments, student C21 reveals some insight to the fictional character's dilemma and his resolution to change his identity.

**C21** *The title of the short story is very important within the narrative because it sort of explains what the story is about. Giovanni Martinelli is from an Italian family who seem 'close-knit' and when Giovanni came to Melbourne his name was later changed to Jonathon Martin. Personally, I wouldn't try to be something I'm not because your heritage is something you can't change.*

*In Giovanni's situation, where he changed his identity to become someone else. Different cultures are not greatly accepted into society. From Giovanni Martinelli to Jonathon Martin, the only thing he changed was his legacy from ancestors. I wouldn't change my name because I am comfortable with the way I am.*

*In the end, it's kind of ironic because Jonathon grew up not wanting to be Italian and his daughter Annabelle's first boyfriend turned out to be an Italian. Jonathon probably would have reacted in a way of awe.*

The student assesses the importance of the short story's title of *Identity* and its relevance "within the narrative". She proceeds to explain "what the story is about" and identifies the Martinelli family as "close-knit" upon their arrival in Melbourne. It is the student's personal opinion that she "wouldn't try to be something I'm not because your heritage is something you can't change." However, in the second paragraph she offers an explanation for "Giovanni's situation" and why "he changed his identity" to "Jonathon Martin". One of her reasons is that "Different cultures are not greatly accepted into society", but at least, the student recognizes that there are "Different cultures" and reasons that "the only thing he changed was his legacy from ancestors", which was exactly Giovanni's intention. The student ends her statement in the second paragraph with the personal reflection that "I wouldn't change my name because I am comfortable with the way I am." Although the student touches on some of the hardships of being

immigrants in Australia where they are not always “accepted into society”, she cannot empathize further, because she is “comfortable with the way I am”. It is difficult for the student to relate to Giovanni’s hardships because she is of Anglo-Australian background and is readily accepted into the majority Australian society.

Although the statement of comfortability is made above, she does correctly identify the irony which is central to the short story’s understanding with her comments in the last paragraph that, “Jonathon, grew up not wanting to be Italian”. The explanation continues in that “Jonathon probably would have reacted in a way of awe” at seeing his daughter, who was brought up as an Anglo-Australian, bring home an Italian boyfriend. The predicament of identity is difficult to fully understand unless it has been personally experienced or envisaged through interaction with others who have experienced it. In this case the student’s first interaction of this nature is through the literary text of a short story. In some areas she is able to demonstrate Some Understanding toward the dilemmas Italian immigrants have faced coming to Australia.

As with many of the other students, C29 also reveals some specific information about Italians as immigrants, but more on the overall immigration to Australia in his pre-short story comments.

**C29** *All that I know about Italian Immigrants is that they are Italian, and immigrants. They came to Australia and America as they were the new ‘promised lands’ containing farmland, and fertile soil. They formed tight-knit communities all around Australia, such as A.V.*

*Many other immigrants have come here too – such as the Chinese, Vietnamese, the Croats and the English; and also the Irish and the Dutch – as well as the Italians and Greeks. This is what makes Australia such a multicultural society.*

*Many Arabic people in recent times have started to flee their war-ridden countries (often because of the West, ironically) to live in Australia. Unfortunately, Australia often is not kind to these Asylum seekers – locks them up in detention centres and prisons. This does not reflect our casual, welcoming and ‘mate-ish’ image.*

*In conclusion, although in the past, Australia has been welcoming – in recent times – the Government has not been welcoming and have not lived up to the “Australian Spirit”. It is sad, but necessary says the Government, but how, by rejecting their fellow humans, can they call themselves Australians?*

There is Limited Knowledge that student C29 supplies about Italian immigration to Australia, is all contained in the opening paragraph which consists of three and half lines. Australia was considered by these immigrants as one of the “new ‘promised lands’” which offered them “farmland and fertile soil.” Here the student assumes that the Italian immigrants went out in the country to farm the ‘fertile’ land. Some, of course did, however, the majority worked and lived in the capital cities of Australia, most of them doing manual labour for their living, which is also represented in the short story. The first sentence denotes his lack of specific information that “they are Italian, and immigrants”, which are the obvious words predominantly in the question. However, he does reveal a deeper meaning of the Italian immigrants, in that “They formed tight-knit communities all around Australia” and the suburb he mentions is in the northern districts where most students live. It is implied that he has observed the Italian communities, or he has heard others talk about them as a “tight-knit” group of people, which demonstrates Limited Knowledge about Italians who came to Australia as immigrants.

There is more written about the people who make up the general immigrants to Australia and he lists some as “Chinese, Vietnamese, the Croats and the English; and the Irish and the Dutch . . . and Greeks”. He identifies these groups as making up “a multicultural



society” of Australia, which also includes “Many Arabic people in recent times.” As a student of history, he identifies the Arab immigrants as an irony for the “West” who imposed upon them and they had to “flee their war-ridden countries”. The student shows Empathy With the “Asylum seekers” who are locked “up in detention centres and prisons” when they arrive in Australia. According to the student, this sort of attitude, does not reflect the “‘mate-ish’ image” for which Australia is well known. The student continues, in the third paragraph, on the same image of the “Australian Spirit” and places blame on the Australian Government who “has not been welcoming”, but “rejecting their fellow humans”. It is presumed that the implication here is to the recent arrivals of Asylum seekers as reference is made to “recent times” and he asks the pertinent question how can the Government “call themselves Australians?” if they act in this way.

This is not a very unusual emphasis on Asylum seekers rather than Italian immigrants. Asylum seekers have been and still are very current form of immigrants portrayed in the daily media and students are exposed to this constant occurrence. On the other hand, the majority of Italian immigrants arrived in Australia post World War Two and in recent times this immigration has declined; they have become an accepted part of the social fabric compared to the Asian, especially the Chinese, and Middle Eastern/Arabic immigrants to Australia. It is of note that the student had formed an empathic attitude toward the immigrant as the ‘cultural other’, whether he/she be Italian or from any where else. However, his specific Knowledge of the Italian immigrant in Australia was Limited.

Subsequently, student C29's specific response to the post-short story questions reveal a thinking process where he pauses to consider the second question and finds himself unable to answer precisely.

**C29** *The title is very important, as it creates a mood right from the start. Towards the end, the title makes sense and the story comes together.*

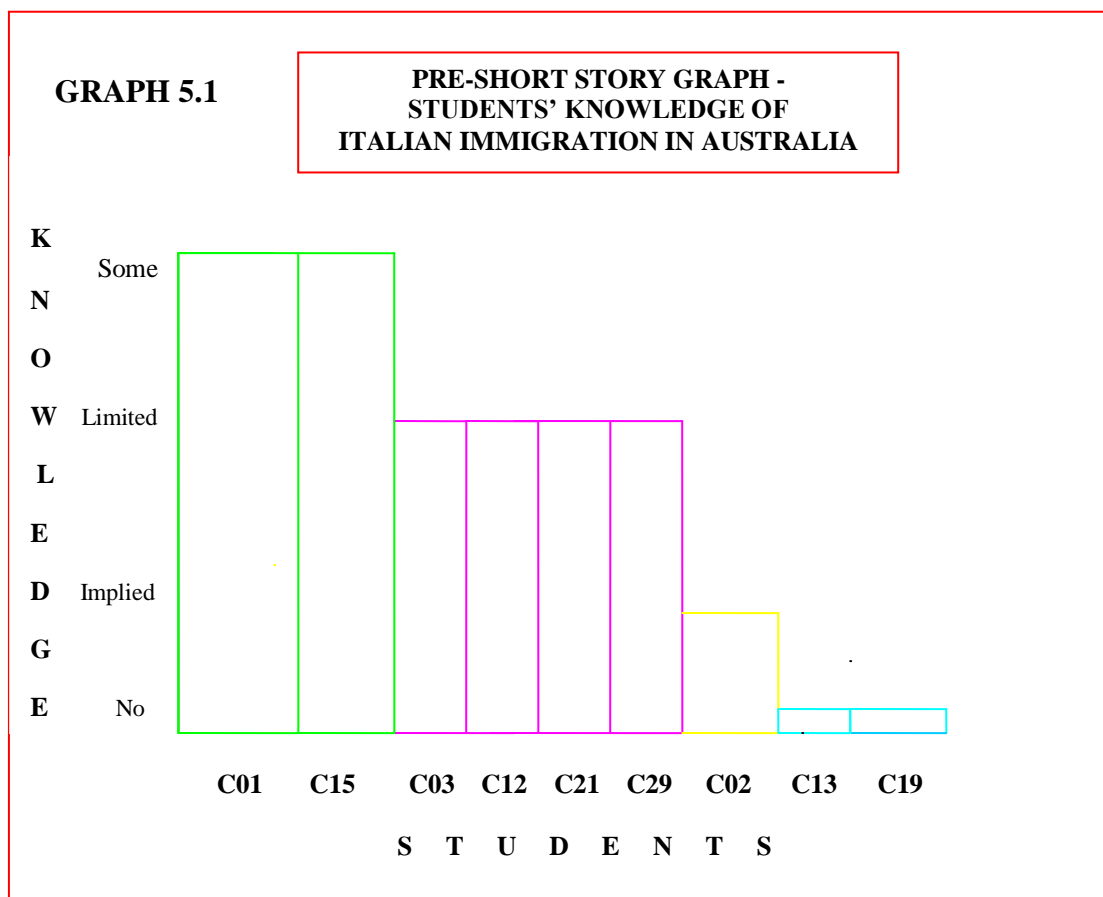
*I don't know ----- I've never been in a situation where I had to put my national pride on the line (except possibly in the Olympics . . . and probably the cricket).*

*I think that Jonathon remembered his identity and wanted to renew it. He probably felt guilty about his father, but saw similarities between him and his wife and his daughter and Robert. If I was him I'd go and make peace with my parents.*

The student connects with the title of the short story and states that "it creates a mood right from the start." He also assesses that "the title makes" the ending of the story come "together" which is an integral part of its meaning and narrative cohesion. His response to the second question as to what would he do in Giovanni's situation is not answered as confidently as the first. The student simply says "I don't know" and uses about half a line of horizontal dashes to indicate his uncertain thoughts of this predicament. He was unable to place himself in the fictional character's situation. The interpretation the student gives of the situation is "national pride" and indeed he has "never been" in such a situation. Giovanni's dilemma, which is primarily of family identity, is deflected to the international arena which covers the "Olympics . . . and probably the cricket." This indicates the difficulty the student has to place himself in Giovanni's family ethnicity problem and this is understood by virtue of the fact that the student's family immigration background emanates from England. Here, again, is a student who has not experienced interaction with another person of ethnic background to comprehend any of his/her

desires to assimilate in a culture so that one is seen to be the same as the majority in society. The appropriate language and mores can contribute to this elusive assimilation, and unless drastic measures are taken, such as those of Giovanni who found it imperative to identify with the Anglo-Australian culture, it is difficult to be totally accepted as one within the dominant culture.

In the final paragraph, the student addresses the question directly and suggests that “Jonathon remembered his identity and wanted to renew it.” He probes further into the character’s thinking processes and surmises that Jonathon “felt guilty about his father”. Here, the student expresses a Little Understanding about the ‘solidarity of family’ in the Italian culture, as well as in his own Anglo-Australian culture. Furthermore, he was able to comment on the “similarities between him and his wife and his daughter and Robert.” This shows some Appreciation of Family Issue, but he gives no evidence of understanding cultural differences in Italian family life. Ultimately, the student reflects on how he would react if he were Jonathon and as with most other students, he states that “I’d go and make peace with my parents.” This may seem a simple solution to most of the students, but to stand in Jonathon’s shoes is a difficult exercise of the mind for students who lack any experience of interaction outside the Anglo-Australian culture.



The above graph shows each Year Ten student's Knowledge on Italian immigration in Australia prior to reading and analysing the short story text *Identity*. Each student is placed within the appropriate classification related to the level of their Knowledge which is indicated by colour groupings. In their pre-short story comments, student C01 revealed Some Knowledge (as compared to Limited or No Knowledge) of Italian immigrants when she claimed that they "brought their strong culture to Australia" so that "Italian food has almost become part of the Australian culture, such as, pasta and pizza". Another student who shows Some Knowledge of Italian immigrants in Australia is student C15 who places mass immigration from Italy "in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century" and suggests that "Australian people didn't except [sic] these immigrants and hardly made any effort to."

Approximately one quarter of the students, in the green group, have Some Knowledge of Italian immigrants in Australia and exhibit this in their remarks.

Some students, in the pink group, such as C03, reveal Limited Knowledge “regarding the immigration to Australia of Italians”, however, she is able to “presume that they immigrated due to either hostile conditions or difficulties they experienced in Italy.” Similarly, student C12 only knows “that they came here in a boat” and although student C21 does not specifically refer to the Italian culture, she does know, generally, that “other cultures have had a real influence on our food and ways of life.” As for student C29 he knows that Italian immigrants “formed tight-knit communities all around Australia”. Approximately half of the students show Limited Knowledge on the subject matter and offer very little relevant information.

One student, C02 identified with the yellow colour, can be said to have Implied Knowledge. Although she is of Italian background, she states only that “my grandparents who are Italians arrived in Australia in 1940” and “it took them a month to arrive”. More information may have been expected from this student, however, her remarks are impersonal and guarded. This solitary student’s withheld knowledge is unusual, particularly that her background is of Italian ancestry.

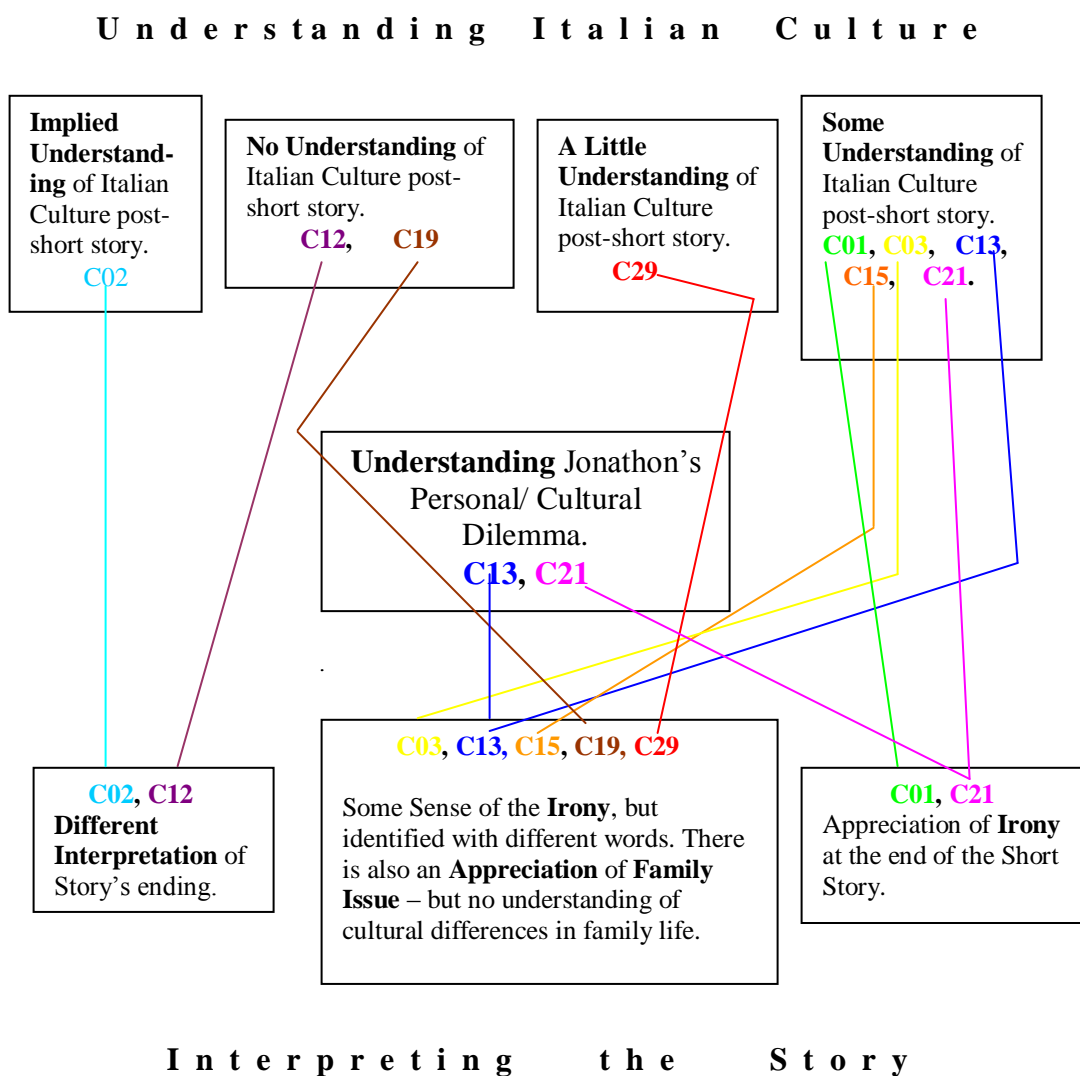
In the case of students who had No Knowledge of Italian immigration to Australia, as indicated in the blue grouping on the chart, C13 does not address this issue at all in her comments. She prefers to remark on her own immigration to Australia and the only

awareness of this “subject of immigration is that I, myself, am an immigrant.” In a similar way, student C19 proffers succinct information that he does “not know anything about Italian immigrants” and furthermore he chooses “not to follow up on this”. Thus, approximately one quarter of the students simply have No Knowledge of Italian immigration to Australia, or are able to offer any knowledge regarding this topic.

In the post-short story comments at Year Ten, the questions were designed to focus the students' attention on Interpreting the Story as an indication of their Understanding of the Italian Culture.

DIAGRAM 5.1

**POST-SHORT STORY DIAGRAM  
OF STUDENTS' INTERPRETATION  
AND UNDERSTANDING  
OF ITALIAN CULTURE**



The above diagram summarizes the Year Ten students' *interpretation* of the short story and *understanding* of the Italian culture in Australia. The analysis of the students' interpretation of the short story was primarily focused on their post-short story comments, in relation to the story's last paragraph, in particular. Only two students are able to identify the irony, per se: C01 and C21 which is just under a quarter of the participants. However, just below this are the five students who were not able to identify the irony, but explained it in their own particular words: C03, C13, C15, C19 and C29, which is a little over half of the participating students. The two students, C02 and C12 who interpreted the ending in quite a different way, found it difficult to gain a meaning relevant to the story. The above group of five students, who also show understanding of the Martinelli family's issue, reveal a personal Appreciation of Family dysfunction and loyalty, however, cannot comprehend the specificity of the issue in an Italian family culture compared to their own Anglo-Australian family culture. These students refer to their own family relationships and primarily voice their approbation of family values; most commented that Jonathon's behaviour towards his family was not appropriate. Most students can see the similarities, but cannot define the differences in the Italian culture compared to their own Anglo-Australian.

However, central to the interpretation of the short story is Jonathon's Personal/Cultural Dilemma, which is placed in the central position to emphasize his immense desire for a complete assimilation into the Anglo-Australian culture. As shown in the diagram, there are only two students, C13 and C21, who reveal understanding for Jonathon's predicament and his need to assimilate. Of importance is that student C13's ability to



comprehend the character Jonathon's dilemma can be explained by her personal experience as a 'cultural other' from South Africa. On the other hand, student C21's understanding has not been reached through such direct personal experience. Her deeper understanding of the 'cultural other' has come through the readings and the study of the short story as a literary text in the English class. These two students represent less than a quarter of the students who are able to place themselves in Jonathon's shoes and Understand his Personal/Cultural Dilemma and why it was important for the fictional character, to change his identity.

Overall, there are very few students who interpreted Jonathon's quandary in regard to his identity and rejection of his Italian culture. However, there are five students who have Some Sense of the Irony and an Appreciation of it. It is understandable that the majority of the students cannot detect the underlying reasons for Jonathon's immense desire to assimilate in the Australian culture within the narrative. This reflects upon the students' lack of personal experiences with the Italian 'cultural other' who has primarily assimilated into the Australian culture and particularly in the school environment, such as student C02.

The other important aspect to the short story was to understand the Italian culture as shown in Diagram 5.1. Analysis of their understanding of the Italian Culture was focused upon the second and particularly, the third paragraph of the students' responses. For students C12 and C19, representing one third of the students, there is No Understanding of the Italian culture which can be clearly discerned. The solitary student, C02, who is of

Italian background, appeared to understand more than she was willing to overtly state and was placed in the Implicit Understanding box of the diagram. However, through her Implicit Knowledge and meanings, it was discerned that there was an underlying understanding of the Italian culture, although she gave a Different Interpretation of the short story's ending. Student C29 projects A Little Understanding of the Italian culture in his writings which reveals he has comprehended some of the author's intended meanings, but not as much as the last group of students in the diagram, C01, C03, C13, C15, and C21 representing just above half of the participant students. They revealed a higher comprehension of the Italian culture after studying the short story and were placed accordingly in Some Understanding, Diagram 5.1.

Each individual student in the appropriate Interpreting box of Diagram 5.1 is connected by line-arrows to the suitable Understanding box, post-short story. All of the students have transferred from Interpreting to Understanding with some disparity between the two. In other words, reading and interpreting the short story has enabled the students to gain some understanding of Italian culture. One of the students who defies this is C19; he had some sense of the literary Irony, yet by the end of the studied short story there is No Understanding of the Italian cultural differences. Another student who shows No Understanding of the Italian culture is C12, whose interpretation of the short story loses its meaning. More than half of the students were able to gain Some Understanding of the Italian culture, specifically through the study and influence of the English literary text. There was room to have gained a greater comprehension of the Italian culture by reaching 'excellent understanding' of this long standing culture in Australia, however, considering

the students' monocultural family life and environments, their attainment of Some Understanding, at this stage of their learning could be considered a consolidation of their more positive response to those who were culturally different from themselves.

### **5.3 Theory Link to Data**

The above students' data reveal, firstly, that the majority of students have Limited or No Knowledge of the Italian population as immigrants to Australia, which confirms the lack of interaction with cultural others in the monocultural environment of the northern suburbs in which the students live. Secondly, the student who does have an Italian background appears to have assimilated so well into the dominant Anglo-Australian culture of the school that teacher and students are not able to discern her original cultural background. The only identification of the Italian-Australian students may be their Italian surname which most still use as their official name, although, their behaviour and physical appearance in mainstream public life reveals little or no trace of their Italian culture.

Florian Znaniecki's 'humanistic sociology' acknowledges the important role of the individual as a conscious agent who is an active participant in his or her social/cultural context. A demonstration of this is given by student C02 who chose to make just an Implied reference to her Italian background by stating only that her grandparents were Italians and that they "arrived in Australian in 1940 . . . in a boat. This student's data also reveals something of the *value* of Italian *family solidarity* that exists in her home life by stating that she would not 'ignore her father and I would thank him" (Znaniecki 1969,

p. 93). However, she is hesitant to acknowledge more overtly her involvement within the Italian culture. The teacher/researcher knew her parents and both were of Italian background maintaining within the family Italian traditions, such as, respect for their elders and minimal socializing for school age daughters.

However, student C02 guards the revelation of her family life from anyone outside of her home environment; thus her Implied comments on the subject of Italian immigrants in Australia. Accordingly, Antonina Kloskowska's theory of *cultural valency* is applicable to this particular student. Although student C02 projects a *national identification* as 'univalent' to one culture, in reality she is most likely 'bivalent'. That is, her competence and commitment may be toward two cultures: Anglo-Australian and Italian, albeit the latter is concealed to all in her life at school. For Kloskowska, national identity is a "complicated phenomenon" for "both in the past and in the present . . . [and] risky . . . to pronounce judgments on who may be acknowledged as a genuine Pole" or in this context Australian (Kloskowska 2001, p. 129). Within this complexity for "the feeling of nationality", *valency* in another culture appears to fill the need for "self-worth, personal dignity, and a feeling of participation in the community" (Kloskowska 2001, p. 117).

There is another possible interpretation of C02's responses. Although, according to the collected data, the majority of the students could not relate to the fictional character, Jonathon, in the short story, student C02 may have wanted to "'fit in' into the allocated niche through behaving as its established residents did" (Bauman 2001, p. 476). As Bauman states modernity "replaces the '*determination*' of social standing with a

compulsive and obligatory ‘*self*’ determination” (Bauman 2001, p. 475). The fictional character Jonathon and student C02 may both be seen as self determined persons who opt to assimilate into the dominant Anglo-Australian culture (Znaniiecki 1969, p. 48; Grathoff, 2000). The old issue of whether Art imitates Life or Life imitates Art is quite relevant here: the character Jonathon imitates, metaphorically speaking, student C02’s assimilating and covert behaviour in the English classroom. Perhaps C02’s cryptic written comments can be interpreted as her recognition of the dilemma of assimilation into the dominant culture, within the short story, as her own secret desire and her realisation that she is following Jonathon’s pattern in her life at school.

Alternatively, student C02 may prefer to belong to the ‘in-group’ of the majority Anglo-Australian culture at school, rather than in an ethnic ‘out-group’ which is often viewed with “suspicion” and “prejudice’. It is easier to assimilate within the ‘in-group’ which offers some form of “solidarity” and protection. Student C02 states in her post-short story comments that the fictional father had a “heart attach [sic] . . . “watching his daughter and boyfriend swim”, which was a Different Interpretation. One extreme explanation for these comments is that her own father maybe preventing her from having a non-Italian boyfriend and she is afraid that if she insists in ‘self determination’, this may cause him a heart attack.

The only other non-Australian student (South African born of mixed background) within this class is C13 who seems to understand and acknowledge the Italian immigrant’s cultural dilemma. Although she is not Italian, her behaviour is more overt and she is able

to comprehend why the fictional character Jonathon resorts to take the assimilation action rather than risk any condemnation within mainstream life for practicing a different culture.

More than half of the other participants showed Appreciation for the Family Issues within the short story narrative, but their comments showed that they were interpreting the events of the story in terms of relationships with their own family. Perhaps this can be explained by students' unchallenged assumptions that Italian patterns of family life were similar to their own. Their transactional experience with the short story *Identity* does not seem to have developed any real knowledge and understanding of the cultural differences between Italian and mainstream family life. In contrast, their engagement with the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* was more effective in considerably increasing many of the students' understanding of Aboriginal family life.

More than half of the other participants showed Appreciation for the Family Issues within the short story narrative, but their comments showed that they were interpreting the events of the story in terms of relationships with their own family. The five students concerned were unable to discern cultural family differences between themselves and the fictional Italian family. Vygotsky's concept of collaborative forms of thinking where a "child's *spontaneous* concepts come into contact with the *scientific* concepts introduced by adults" (Kozulin 1990, p. 170) is very relevant to the Year Ten class' study of the short story on identity. The students' *spontaneous concepts* (everyday concepts) about Italian immigration to Australia were based on Limited Knowledge. There are only two

students, C01 and C15 who achieve Some Knowledge of Italian immigrants in Australia. However, after reading and studying the short story, *Identity* and with the formal education through the *scientific concepts*, in this case through the aid of the teacher as the ‘proximal’ person, according to Vygotsky’s concept of the *zone of proximal development*, the students are able to reach their possible development of ‘higher mental processes’. It is revealed through this investigation of the Year Ten students’ post-short story comments that five students out of nine achieved Some Understanding of the Italian culture in Australia. That is more than double the students’ *spontaneous* Knowledge of this topic. One student had a Little Understanding, another one Implied Understanding and two students No Understanding as shown in Diagram 5.1.

Each student in Year Ten reveals a different level of development in *scientific concepts*. There is, of course, “no uniform pattern in the relationship between learning and mental development . . . The interacting curves of learning and development need to be plotted individually” (Kozulin 1990, p. 171). The developmental potential is reflected in the difference of Knowledge about Italian immigration to Australia pre-short story (students’ *spontaneous concepts*), as seen in Graph 5.1. This is compared to the formal post-short story (students’ *scientific concepts*), shown in Diagram 5.1, which with the assistance of the teacher (an “adult”) enables the students to gain ‘higher-order learning’ in Understanding Italians in Australia as the ‘cultural other’. For example, student C21 offered Limited Knowledge regarding immigration of Italians to Australia in her pre-short story comments as *spontaneous* Knowledge. However, the *scientific* Understanding showed that she was only one of two who gained an Understanding of the fictional character, Jonathon’s Personal Cultural Dilemma with an Appreciation for the Irony at

the end of the story. In the last count, she was among the five students who attained Some Understanding of the Italian culture in Australia. The self-mastery of a student's "ability to master himself or herself as a consequence of the 'social moment' of consciousness" are part of the 'higher mental functions' and a "consciousness capable of free and deliberate choice" (Packer 2008, p. 8).

Added to the above concepts, Vygotsky's theory of *mediation* and in particular *semiotic mediators*, from which works of literature can act as *psychological tools*, have far reaching effects in transforming a "natural impulse into higher mental processes" (Kozulin 1990, p. 114; Daniels 2003). The literary text is essential as a 'psychological tool' used in a classroom situation which mediates a person's own psychological processes, and ultimately leads to his/her "own nature changes" and "mastery of behaviour". The short story acted as a *psychological tool* from which several of the students' attitudes toward the Italian immigrants changed and revealed some "mastery of behaviour" through the Knowledge and Understanding they gained by reading and analysing the text *Identity*. (Compare Graph 5.1 with Diagram 5.1).

The variation in the students' interpretation of meanings in the written language, within the short story *Identity*, can be explained by applying Louise M. Rosenblatt's theory of *aesthetic reading* in the English classroom. This means that the literary text, as an important *psychological tool*, in producing 'higher mental processes' according to the depth of reading given to the text. How closely the implied meanings of the words used by the author is in Elizabeth Fergus-Jean's quotation from C.S. Lewis, "the word . . .



[which] can be dug out of us” to realise “deep perspectival awareness . . . [to] perceive others, and the images that are manifested in culture” (Fergus-Jean 2008, pp. 125 &132). It is in the *aesthetic reading* which enables the teacher and students to have “dug out” deep meanings from the words in the literary text. During these processes, a *transactional experience* between the reader and the text develops, whereby the student feels and lives the story as an ‘event’, as an *experience* in the journey of the plot in the literary text. As Kristina Love writes in her article, it is the “talk around the text” and the development of “moral subjectivities” that bring the students, through interpreting the literary text, to new levels of “their own moral ‘codes’” (Love 2001, p. 215).

For instance, students C13 and C03 showed No Knowledge and Limited Knowledge of Italians as immigrants in Australia, respectively. After their *transactional* process with the text, *Identity*, student C13 acquired Understanding for the protagonist’s Personal Cultural Dilemma, with Appreciation of the Irony in the short story and subsequently, Some Understanding of the Italian Culture. Student C03 attained Some Sense of the Irony and Appreciation of the Family Issue in her interpretation of the story, and ultimately gained Some Understanding of Italian culture in Australia. In this *transactional* process, imagination, as it occurs in the mind, is imperative as a means for any changes to occur in the students’ attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’.

The imagination as the important process of the mind reveals imagery, which becomes the emotion and experience of the students. For Vygotsky, the mind’s functioning is not ‘static’ and his concern was with the relationships between phenomena and the processes

which instigate change over a period of time. People's interaction with each other or with the *psychological tool*, brings about meanings in a social context, which are internalized and conducted psychologically to create an image (Vygotsky 1987). Once the image is internalized, "mental functions interact with each other to form more flexible, complex functional systems . . . [which are only] constrained by the possibilities inherent in the particular social, cultural and historical symbolic capabilities and tools available" (Moran & John-Steiner 2010, p. 3).

Armed with the above tools, concepts which control the creative imagination and express themselves in particular human personalities begin to form and transform a person through societal relationships and so become a contributor within the cultural environment. Placing this theory in perspective with the data, it reveals that the students' learning of the 'cultural other', through the psychological tool of the short story text, become the preliminary steps to their transformation in their maturation toward Empathy With others of a different culture. Vygotsky wrote that "We cannot master the truth about personality and personality itself so long as mankind has not mastered the truth about society and society itself . . . The new society will create the new man." (Vygotsky 2004, p. 343). For the students to master this growth in their personality, it is important to enter and accept 'new societies' which will assist with their development in understanding other cultures, as well as their own.

#### **5.4 Conclusion of Chapter Five**

To enter and accept new societies is a difficult task for the students at this Independent College. As it has been established, their environment is monocultural at school, home

and the environs and the probability of this occurring is highly unlikely in such milieux. This research seeks, therefore, to establish if the English literary text can become an experiential medium in understanding the 'cultural other'. As is evidenced in this Chapter, this experience is quite possible between the reader and the text. It also remains to state that making the interpretation intended by the authors involves a relatively sophisticated literary judgement. At times this was difficult to make for some of the students, especially in Year Ten. It could also be taken as evidence of the monocultural outlook that prevails among the students. They have no way of comprehending literary characters' dilemmas, because they have no practical experience of a culture other than their own, unless they attain it through the experience of the literary text and their imagination as it is psychologically processed within their mind, as many did in the case of Aboriginal culture, after studying *Rabbit Proof Fence*.

Before the psychological process occurs, the students' pre-short story data reveals their Knowledge of Italians as immigrants to Australia and much of the Knowledge provided by the students is Limited. They bring to their written statements *pre-existing values* of which many are monoculturally inclined. As Graph 5.1 shows, the students are grouped according to their Knowledge of Italian immigration in Australia. After reading and studying the short story, Diagram 5.1 reveals some significant shifts that the students made toward better Understanding the Italian culture. The literary text was imperative to the students' Understanding and change of attitude toward the Italian as the 'cultural other'.

Just as importantly are the actual reading processes that occur within the formal classroom which Rosenblatt terms *aesthetic reading*. This in-depth reading of the literary text enables the student to create a *transactional experience* between the reader and the text in which the student participates in the experiential emotions and feelings that emanate from the meanings of the author's words. Vygotsky calls an interaction with the text *interpsychological* and when the meanings of the text are experienced as feelings they are transformed within the imagination as *intrapsychological* processes. This creates 'higher mental learning' for change of attitude within the student toward the 'cultural other'.

The students' thoughts and feelings, about the 'cultural other', continue to be investigated for Years Eleven and Twelve in Chapter Six, in order to trace any development over the next two years' study of literary texts.

## **Chapter Six: Years Eleven and Twelve Studies – German and British Experiences of World War One and Students’ Personal Choice of Texts**

### **6.1 The Year Eleven Teacher’s Memoir and Year Twelve’s Chosen Texts**

The discussion in this chapter centres on an investigation of the thoughts and feelings toward the ‘cultural other’ expressed by nine students in Year Eleven and Year Twelve of their secondary English classes. To achieve this and to present this chapter in the clearest manner, the researcher organized the data into two parts: Section A – Year Eleven Study; Section B – Year Twelve Study. The Year Eleven Study is the teacher/researcher’s memoir of the students’ engagement with a literary novel of a German soldier as the ‘cultural other’ but includes the portrayal of a marginalized soldier as the ‘other’ who is dominated by power and unjust authority; the poetry is from a British World War One poet. Contrastingly, there was no specific class text studied by the Year Twelve students who instead completed the analysis of texts of their own choosing. In this last stage of the investigation, the texts selected by the Year Twelve students can be seen as reflecting the literary influence upon each student’s understanding of the ‘cultural other’, as this is projected in the different choice of texts studied.

These nine students remained in the same class with the researcher as teacher throughout the two years, as indicated in the previous chapter. Their Year Eleven discourse was analysed for evidence of their growth in Positivity of Attitudes and Depth of Understanding toward the German soldier as the ‘cultural other’ and ‘marginalized other’. For the Year Twelve study importance was placed upon the various literary texts

which these students selected. This is explained more in the analysis of the Year Twelve students' written comments.

## **6.2 Section A – Year Eleven Study - Students: C01, C02, C03, C12, C13, C15, C19, C21 and C29**

The researcher's methodology for the Year Eleven Study, compared to the other years, changed in quite a significant manner. In this instance, the attitudes and understanding of the students were approached from the teacher/researcher's perspective in the form of *memoir*. It was envisaged that this would give a different, but complementary viewpoint of the students' verbal analysis and comprehension of the studied texts, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, by Erich Maria Remarque and a poem, *Insensibility*, by Wilfred Owen. The novel and poem had a number of features which the Year Eleven students grappled to come to terms with, not least the fact that the novel was written by a German soldier of World War One. The experiences described in both texts revealed the innocence of youth; the insensibility of a group of young men at war; and the cruelty of the drill corporal, in the novel, towards these soldiers, in particular to two whom he set up for nothing more than their pure humiliation, for his own selfish gratification.

### **6.2.1 An Explication of the Novel and Poem**

*All Quiet on the Western Front*, a novel, was set in the early Twentieth Century about World War One, and the narrative was written from a German soldier's perspective, namely, the author himself, Erich Maria Remarque. Its themes relate to prejudice, cruelty, power, authority and repercussions of war. The character Corporal Himmelstoss was a quiet man as a postman in a civilian life, but why "an ex-postman with a couple of

stripes should have more power over us than our parents ever had or our teachers” (Remarque 1994, p.16), could only be explained by the power he gained in the army and the authority he had over the soldiers. Contrastingly, the character Kat who symbolized a father-figure to the soldiers explained that

*if you offer a man a bit of power, the same thing happens; he'll grab it. It's instinctive, because when it comes down to it, a man is basically a beast, and it's only later that a bit of decency gets smeared on top, the way you can spread dripping on your bread. The main thing about the army is that there is always somebody with the power to give orders to the rest (Remarque 1994, p.31).*

The cruelty with which Himmelstoss treated the character Tjaden, who happened to be a bed-wetter, revealed the ingenuity of delight in torturing this soldier. His solution to this problem was to find

*another bed-wetter from one of the other barracks, a man called Kindervater, and put him in with Tjaden. The barracks where we did our training had the usual arrangement of bunks, one bed above the other, with the bottom part of each bed made of wire mesh. Himmelstoss arranged things so that the pair of them were together, one on the top and the other on the bottom bunk. The one underneath, of course, had a really raw deal (Remarque 1994, p.33).*

This humiliation was torment for both of the soldiers who were forced to interchange the lower bedding position at regular intervals. Himmelstoss' actions were a despicable and dastardly use of his power, the perversity of man and the brutality of a human being who lost humility whilst he gained in power and authority during the war.

For the students to understand the universality of war, a poem, *Insensibility*, by the British poet, Wilfred Owen was compared to Remarque's novel. The poem is in six stanzas and Owen, who was a young soldier of twenty, wrote the poetry about the horrors

and repercussions of World War One as he experienced them. In this, he was similar to Remarque; both wrote their literary works to reflect their parallel emotional traumas and wartime experiences. In stanza six Owen describes the ramifications of war upon the soldier's psyche:

*But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,  
That they should be as stones;  
Wretched are they, and mean  
With paucity that never was simplicity.  
By choice they made themselves immune  
To pity and whatever mourns in man  
Before that last sea and the hapless stars;  
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;  
Whatever shares  
The eternal reciprocity of tears* (Owen 1972, p. 38).

The above stanza voices the emotional void which acts to shield the horrors of war from the soldiers. "By choice they made themselves immune/To pity and whatever mourns in man". To shoot, to kill are acts of command in war and these young soldiers are "Wretched" as they transform themselves into "dullards" and "stones" to face the daily deaths of their comrades.

Comparable to Owen's poem, above, Remarque writes about "dead men [who] are hanging in trees" and a little further in the narrative he describes in more detail a "dead man [who] is lying on his face. The earth is black from blood underneath the arm sockets. The ground is scuffed by his feet, as though he went on kicking for a while." Another comrade who witnessed the cruelty of death reassured the other soldiers that "The main thing is not to let it all get to you" (Remarque 1994, p. 147). The trauma that is inflicted upon these young men of war is shared in "eternal reciprocity of tears" (Owen 1972, p. 38).



### 6.2.2 The Teacher/Researcher's Memoir

*In teaching the above Year Eleven novel, “All Quiet on the Western Front”, there were some problems encountered by a few of the students who found it difficult to reflect back to the early Twentieth Century of World War One (WW1). Some students confused it with World War Two (WW2) and references to Hitler and, at times, the Jewish genocide were voiced. It became obvious that a little time needed to be spent on historical-time relevancy for the students' ability to reflect on events that occurred one hundred years ago. A research assignment was created for the students who were required to research visuals and information of WW1 and present their results to the class. This proved to be a most helpful preamble to the reading of the novel.*

*The students were able to download and collect visuals of the atrocities of war which helped them to place in perspective the millions that died. They were also fascinated that the use of horses during WW1 was an essential aspect to mobility in that war. There was a gruesome description by Remarque about horses who had been hit by shells and “The belly of one of the horses has been ripped open and its guts are trailing out” (Remarque 1994, p. 45). This revealed the totality of the war and how animals were, also, not spared. The male students were interested in the war technology of the time: the planes, tanks, rifles and for the first time the use of chemical warfare – the gas. Most of the female students researched the part that women played in the war or the traumas suffered by the soldiers, such as, shell-shock.*

*One of the important factors was for the students to analyse the novel by reading it at home and followed up with supplementary readings in the classroom. There were two key aspects of the novel that required detailed discussion on the characterization of: one, Tjaden, as a marginalized ‘other’ in his social context of war; and two, Paul Bäumer, as the ‘cultural other’ who narrated the war from a German’s perspective. There were many other issues that were discussed in class, but one, in particular, was important to focus upon and this dealt with the comparable experiences of both German and British soldiers.*

*For the students to estimate the impact of WWI on society, it was necessary for them to see the war through Bäumer's eyes; he was, after all, the narrator of the novel and he wrote of the experiences he had during this war. Discussions ensued around the text, one being the universality of war and that the experiences of the British soldiers were very similar to those of the German soldiers. To make this clearer, the war poems of Wilfred Owen, who was a British soldier during WWI, were also studied and these revealed the close commonalities of the experiences of war from the British point of view. His poem "Insensibility" showed the hardening of the young soldiers' hearts and minds that had seen the horrors of war. This made them dulled toward their surroundings and their fellow human beings. In the third stanza Owen wrote:*

*Having seen all things red,  
Their eyes are rid  
Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.  
And terror's first constriction over,  
Their hearts remain small-drawn.  
Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle  
Now long since ironed,  
Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned (Owen 1972, p. 37).*

*In Remarque's novel in Chapter Four, a young recruit lay wounded on the ground and Remarque described the scene:*

*He has blood smeared all over one hip; he is so exhausted that I reach for my flask which has tea with rum in it. Kat holds back my hand and bends over him. 'Where did you cop it, mate?'*

*The lad is not likely to survive being moved . . . But everything he's been through so far will be nothing compared to those few days until he dies . . . Within an hour he'll be a screaming mass of unbearable agonies, and the few days he still has left to live will be just an incessant raging torture.*

*I nod. 'You're right, Kat. The best thing would be a bullet.'*

*'Give me a gun', he says, and stops walking. I can see that he is set on it. We look around – but we're not alone any more.*

*Kat shakes his head. 'Such young lads -' He says it again: 'Such young, innocent lads' (Remarque 1994, pp. 50-52).*

*The discussions around the two texts, between the students and the teacher/researcher were thought-provoking. For some of the students, particularly the girls, it was hard for them to understand how people's hearts can become so hardened and individuals desensitized to their environment. Life was seen as expendable – it was after all a war of attrition. A few statistics were made available to the students to comprehend the enormity of the war. The statistics showed that eight million men died in battle, twenty-one million were injured, and over six and a half million non-combatants were killed during WWI. Remarque and Owen represent the generation of men who are known to history as the 'lost generation.' The students were staggered by the numbers. The influence of this was made more poignant by the fact that both authors were active participants in the Great War and this gave the students some form of authenticity in the soldiers' real life experiences of war. Some of the students mentioned that they had or still have a grandfather who was once in the Vietnam War, others mentioned relatives who are in Afghanistan and Iraq at present. Soon the students began to realize the futility of war and having acknowledged this, the discussions progressed to the repercussions of war.*

*Loss of life is the ultimate casualty of war, but students were enthusiastic to contribute to other losses due to war. The physical loss of homes, businesses and infrastructure, the loss of a life-style that became extinct, such as, lack of education, lack of income and lack of freedom to choose something else. Another point the students offered was that war leaves a lot of hatred in people's hearts, such as, hatred for all Germans who started the war. The examination of this hatred was further rationalized in that it affects all human beings and that it still goes on. As Owen and Remarque point out in their specific literature, the human experiences are the same when humanity is placed in a similar situation, such as, war.*

*The other aspect of the novel, 'All Quiet on the Western Front', was the characterization of Tjaden. He became a victim to such abhorrent cruelty in the hands of Corporal Himmelstoss, as mentioned in the example above, that his heart was consumed with pure hatred for the dictatorial Corporal. Himmelstoss became the epitome of unmitigated evil*

*that was war. Eventually, Tjaden had his revenge upon Himmelstoss and this caused one of his comrades to say “with an air of grim satisfaction, though a bit oddly, ‘Revenge is as good as a feast’” (Remarque 1994, p. 35). The character of Bäumer also suffered under Himmelstoss’ power over the young soldiers. Bäumer narrated that, “On his orders I scrubbed the floor of the corporals’ mess with a toothbrush. Kropp and I once had to go out sweeping the parade-ground clear of snow with a dustpan and brush on his orders . . . my hands were raw and bleeding” (Remarque 1994, p. 17).*

*Tjaden became the ‘marginalised other’ within the German army corps and the Germans, as a race, experienced much hatred, racism and prejudice during and after the war. Another consequence of the war was the refugees who lost their livelihood, family and friends. This led to the natural progression of discussion about the refugees from other wars: World War Two, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. Having suffered so much, the question was posed whether Australians show sufficient understanding and acceptance of those immigrants. The teacher/researcher went through some of the main countries where people were desperate to immigrate to Australia post WW2: Italians, Greeks, Polish, Maltese, Hungarians, some Germans and many others. Post Vietnam War, a large Vietnamese immigrant population arrived in Australia, as well as other Asian peoples from China, Indonesia, Philippines and India. It was also important to discuss the recent arrivals of Afghan and African populations that had been devastated by wars in their countries.*

*Many of the students were able to empathize with the hardships that these people suffered. One student noted how ‘lucky the people in Australia are as they have not experienced war of this nature’. The students recognized that as newly arrived immigrants in an unknown land, they were in no bargaining position of power – that was held by those who were established Australian citizens of, primarily, Anglo-Australian background. They most likely felt that their country was being invaded by unknown and unwanted people from other alien distant continents. The question was asked if this was still happening with the latest immigrants. Two thirds of the students replied that it was probably hard to estimate because the students lacked experience with any other cultures.*

*In addressing the above question most of the students, voiced in this discourse, that the Australian government was not handling the illegal immigrants appropriately. The refugees were far too long in detention centres and also far too many to deal with, at the same time. The students understood, to a certain degree, this was necessary to protect Australians from diseases that might be brought into Australia by the refugees. One of the students had some difficulty in accepting women who wear the Burqa and their faces cannot be seen. The discussion became quite lively and in the end there was a mixture of consent and dissent – approximately three and six, respectively. From the teacher's point of view, all the students had acquired a more rational attitude toward the 'cultural other', especially for those whose physiognomy was quite different from the white Anglo-Australian population. There were still some questions which were unresolved, but that was to be expected. It was anticipated that this learning process might be a stepping stone to greater empathic understanding of those people who were different in appearance, cultural behaviour and religion. For example, the general attitude toward the German population during and after the war, as discussed in the classroom, could influence the students positively in attitudes toward others from different cultural backgrounds.*

*During the discussion of the issue of abuse of power, another question was asked of the students: How is Himmelstoss' behaviour relevant in today's life? As the students lacked any experience of people from different cultures, the decision was made to look at life in the school context, at times hypothetical, and some of the scenarios the students suggested were bullying that might be in a school yard; or if a student was skinny and weak he might become vulnerable to the larger and stronger students. In contrast, the fat student who was tormented by others and never got picked on a sporting side at recess; or the scenario of a female student who wears a headscarf, 'hijab', because of her religious beliefs and quietly eats by herself at lunch time, somewhere in the corner of the school yard. It was of notable interest that the majority of the students were aware of 'marginalized students' at school, however, very few had done anything about it at the time. One of the students mentioned that now she was older and stronger, it became easier to protect herself and others from bullies and deliberate vindictive students whose*

*sole purpose was to cause pain. A comparison was made that in some ways, many immigrants in Australia have been treated in a similar manner. In this regard, it was difficult for the students to make comparative constructive criticisms, due to their limitation of experience with people from different cultures.*

*The other part of the discussion was whether revenge is the right way to address these problems that occur in life. Some students said that if “you didn’t stand up for yourself, you’d be a target all the time.” Others suggested going through the proper channels of school policy and accordingly deal with these students. The majority of the students agreed, but there were a few who were not quite convinced – teachers could not be everywhere to check on what was happening in every corner of the school yard and that the ability to defend one’s self was important. In this instance there would always be a difference in consensus, but it was unanimously agreed that certain measures could be taken where students were taught to walk confidently, hold their heads up high, learn to defend themselves verbally, and be in the presence of others, rather than on their own. These were some of the ideas mentioned by the students.*

*The students defined people with power as those who were bigger than the victim and/or roamed the school yard in packs where the numbers gave them the power. It was generally thought that those sorts of students always looked and aimed for the vulnerable. Cruelty and torture toward specific students were often continued outside of school. In this regard, the behaviour of Himmelstoss and the school bullies were commonly acknowledged as general human degradation that could be experienced anywhere in the world – one need not be a German soldier. An endeavour was made to see some of these problems through the eyes of newly arrived or existing immigrants in Australia.*

### **6.2.3 Discussion of Teacher’s Memoir**

It was important for the above memoir to point out the students’ responses and reactions, from the teacher/researcher’s point of view, to the specific literary texts mentioned. This

perspective, gained insight to the students' overall thoughts, understandings and attitudes toward those who are vulnerable in society. By addressing the 'marginalized other', the issues became clearer to the students that there were similarities of behaviour also aimed toward the 'cultural other' which can be caused by abuse of power. If Australians are "lucky" to live in this country, as mentioned by one of the students, then as a population it should endeavour to share this good fortune with others who are willing to work and live in this country. Most of the students were able to acknowledge this point of view, but found it difficult to relate it in practical terms in their lives.

The novel and the poem were thought-provoking texts which the teacher/researcher has used previously and will use in the future because of their success to instigate cognitive curiosity and learning processes in the students' mind. The students' reflection on WW1 was somewhat "confused . . . with World War Two." It was not difficult to understand their reaction; they are, after all, the visual generation, when one considers television, computers, ipods, mobile phones, social and paper media where visuals outnumber the written word. Generally, there is very little reference made to WW1, except on ANZAC day, and there are even less visuals, such as, films and DVDs about the Great War. Unless the students study History as a subject at school, it is almost a forgotten topic.

Despite this, the students' curiosity was piqued and their choice of research about WW1 on "chemical warfare – the gas . . . and traumas suffered by the soldiers, such as, shell shock" was conducted with interest and enthusiasm. The draw-back to the students' research of WW1 was the time factor. The extra time taken to familiarize them with this

unique topic of historical importance meant that areas of this study needed to be trimmed to balance the curriculum requirements. This was done by asking the students to read a lot more of the novel at home, than initially intended, rather than as a collective group in class.

The war poems of British poet, Wilfred Owen, were invaluable sources as a comparative text to the novel. If the students were to find the “commonalities of the experiences of war from the British point of view” and the German point of view, it was necessary to regard “the hardening of the soldiers’ hearts” and “minds” after experiencing the “horrors of war”. In the memoir it states that “life was seen as expendable” and to the students, it was a callous and cruel way to think of the soldiers who were dying on the Western Front. The difficulty with the student’s acceptance of this may very well be the result of being a generation which has not experienced direct warfare that affects their own life. Moreover, as the memoir presents, only a few students had relatives who personally experienced war and its horrors.

The analysis of the themes and fictional characters from the texts aided the students to span the time gap of a century and relate their issues to their present day knowledge and understanding. It appears from the memoir that the ‘marginalized other’ was well acknowledged by the students as presented in the texts. Their understanding of the ‘cultural other’ was directly connected to the German soldier in relation to other people’s “hatred for all Germans” in general, because of their instigation of the war. The memoir connects with the ‘marginalized other’ “where people were desperate to immigrate to



Australia post WW2.” A comparison was drawn between the ‘marginalised other’ and the immigrants who may have also experienced a sense of rejection and “hatred” from the “established Australian citizens”.

In analysing the historical context of WW1 through the novel and poem, it instigated progressive discourse of immigrants from other countries to Australia and how some of the themes relevant in the two texts can be applied to the present day ‘cultural other’. Within the memoir it is stated that “The students recognized that as new arrived immigrants in an unknown land, they were in no bargaining position of power” and this refers back to the officers, in the narratives, who had unlimited power over the soldiers. The ability of the students to transfer one set of ideas from the texts into a modern societal environment and into one where the “students lacked experience with any other cultures” reveals their cognitive understanding of the novel and poem’s meanings.

According to the memoir, overall, it was observed that the majority of the students moved out of their familiarity zone, expressed a number of positive attitudes that deepened their understanding of the ‘cultural other’ and of those who were marginalized. The students were able to address the issues in the literary texts with which they were confronted. Knowing there are commonalities in other nationalities aids the students in better understanding cultural differences. The inspiration received through the literature studied in class enabled the students to relate to the issues of the ‘cultural other’ that exist today in Australia. This particular research, for both of these texts, strongly reinforces their values to students, who lacked interaction with other multicultural communities and

opens their thinking to possibilities that they have not experienced in the reality of their monocultural environment. Theoretical connectivity to the Year Eleven data will be discussed in more depth in the section below.

#### **6.2.4 Theory Link to Data**

In the social sciences *memoir* data have had their research validity since W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki introduced this form of human documents. These human documents are an “account of individual experience which reveals the individual’s actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life” (Blumer 1939, p. 29). These kind of documents may include the use of “letters”, “life histories”, such as autobiographies, “newspaper accounts”, “court records” and “records of social agencies”. In Thomas and Znaniecki’s case, the use of prolific letters (764), written by Polish peasants, formed the data base for their social theories in their works of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Znaniecki 1969, pp. 109-110). According to Blumer, whether each letter meets an application of criteria, “their collective consideration would compel one to recognize in them a representativeness, a certain adequacy, and a reliability that cannot be ignored” (Znaniecki 1969, p. 37). However, the last volume of the original publication of *The Polish Peasant* was in the form of a much longer memoir of one immigrant reviewing his experiences in Germany and the United States. It is within the spirit of this approach that the teacher’s *memoir* is presented as an adequate and reliable data source for understanding the social and cultural dimensions of an English classroom in Adelaide.

Another sociologist whose significant view on *memoir* needs to be presented here is J. Chalasinski's 1964 publication, *Twenty Years of People's Poland in the Light of Memoirs of the Younger Rural Generation*. He considers memoirs in an historical perspective which reveals the "social stratum to which the author belongs." To this end a memoir is, therefore, subjective; it is the author's "own history" of feelings and experiences "in his own consciousness" (Smolicz & Secombe 1981, p. 24). The teacher/researcher's "own history" reflects the interaction with the Year Eleven students; it is the study and discourse of a novel and a poem. The history of the Year Eleven English class has a setting in a College where its environment is specifically monocultural and the "students lacked experience" of the 'cultural other'.

In this monocultural environment, the students bring to the study of the text 'pre-existing' cultural 'values' which, to a certain extent, determine the individual's initial interpretation and meanings of the literary text. However, within the English classroom over Years Nine to Eleven, the comprehensive *aesthetic reading* and the *transactional experience* of the literary texts have proved able to inspire the students to greater knowledge, emotions and attitudes that were experienced from a different cultural perspective. Rosenblatt explains that "the aesthetic reader bestows his [or her] attention on a fuller arc of his [or her] response to the verbal symbols, selecting out what can be woven into the relevant structure of idea, feeling and attitude" (Rosenblatt 1978, p. 43).

Some of these emotions experienced by the students in reading the literary texts were the cruelty, hatred and injustices of Corporal Himmelstoss; the hardened metamorphosis of

young soldiers who could “laugh among the dying” (Owen 1972, v.iii, l.12, p. 37) impressed upon the students, especially the males, that these soldiers were only a year or two older than themselves. Hatred and violence are “emotional phenomena [and] essential for understanding purely ‘social facts’ . . . [which] Indeed Znaniecki proves that sentiments arise on the grounds on which we experience cultural values, yet this occurs only in the social process of interactions” (Halas 2000, p. 104). The *transactional experience* between the reader and the text, in a classroom situation, form the basis in which the student experiences new ‘cultural values’. From this it is discerned that a cultural group’s role and participation in rituals and ‘cultural values’ determines the ‘action’ of an individual’s as social and cultural agents. These learned behaviours ultimately express themselves in individual attitudes and group values.

From a psychological point of view, Vygotsky’s position is close to social behaviourist G.H. Mead who states that “internalization by the individual of social processes of experience and behaviour, that is, through the internalization of the conversation of significant gestures, as made possible by the individual’s taking the attitude of the other individuals toward himself or toward what is being thought of him” (Kozulin 1990, pp. 115-116; van der Veer 2007). The literary texts influence the students to display this sort of social and psychological behaviour through the study of the fictional characters and themes. The students are then motivated to transfer these ‘actions’ as scenarios into today’s schools’ environments where the *memoir* states that “Cruelty and torture toward specific students were often continued outside of school.” This hateful and cruel behaviour is learned in a collective social environment (home, school, gangs) where the

influences of other individuals affects the person and in turn activates this behaviour toward someone else. This is also pertinent from the perspective of the 'cultural other' who is reliant upon acceptance, understanding and a positive attitude toward him/her.

Showing to the students that there is a commonality in human behaviour, especially when placed in similar situations, such as war, was of the utmost importance. Some of the universalities of war were the insensibilities of the soldiers, camaraderie, death, youth and power. Both groups of soldiers were fighting in the same geographic position (France) and their economic and army political structures would have been similarly constructed. All the other uniting bonds would have been similarly experienced according to each individual soldier: some may have the same knowledge of arts, even of language and religion.

However, the unity that bonded them the most was the human condition of war and the emotions that were experienced in comparable ways. Having applied this temporary cultural environment to two different armies, it is essential to also state that "universalism is an intentional and value process . . . It aims at connecting human beings without confusing them (it makes them similar not identical). Universalism refers to human subjects who cope with existential issues by interpreting their situation as a problem of mutual reciprocity" (Donati 2000, p. 37). War was most certainly a common problem for both the German and British soldiers where their lives on the Western Front would dictate emotions and actions of "mutual reciprocity".

### 6.3 Section B – Year Twelve Study - Students: C01, C02, C03, C12, C13, C15, C19, C21 and 29

The collected data for the Year Twelve students were comments written in not a too dissimilar manner to the post-short story method of expressing their thoughts and feelings in response to open ended questions on literary texts. In this case, however, the questions were not specific to a particular text being studied, but rather invited the students, toward the end of their formal secondary studies, to reflect on the English texts which had most influenced their thinking. In the course of completing these questions, the students had the opportunity to express their attitudes and understanding of the ‘cultural other’. There were four questions which endeavoured to probe the students’ preferences for texts and the affect of their meanings upon the students who were then able to educe a conscious and social evaluation of their own ideals and thoughts. These four questions were:

1. What texts have you read that have had an influence upon you? Give name of author and text.
2. In what ways have these texts changed your way of thinking? Explain in as much detail as possible.
3. Do you have friends and or social acquaintances that come from a different cultural background? Explain how you cope with the differences.
4. Do you think you have gained tolerance of other people who have different cultures than you? If so, have any of the texts you read helped you to become more tolerant? Explain how.

Each student chose a range of literary texts drawn from those which he/she had studied in the Year Twelve class, or in earlier years. They often included texts which the students had researched as part of their Individual Reading Study which was a compulsory segment of English Studies in their final year. This entailed that the students personally choose two literary texts of a standard suitable to the year level in English, read and analyse the narratives according to a handout guideline. This became an in-depth analysis of the texts which required the students to work on their own with the teacher as facilitator. This developed autonomous skills in research, detailed analysis, better understanding of the authors' style of writing and techniques. A lot of the other literary texts mentioned by the students were class texts which were simply of interest to each student.

### **6.3.1 Year Twelve Data and Their Analysis - Students: C01, C02, C03, C12, C13, C15, C19, C21 and C29**

As explained above, each student's text was specifically his/her own choice, which reflected the greater influence upon Positivity of Attitudes and Depth of Understanding of the 'cultural other'. Student C01 remarks on the following:

**C01** *Mao's Last Dancer – Li Cunxin; The Power of One – Bryce Courtenay; Looking for Alibrandi – Melina Marcheta; Rabbit Proof Fence – Phillip Noyce.*

*They have helped me to see a different view on life as these texts come from different cultural and societal view. These texts have also exposed me to different prejudices that occur in the world, in particular racism. Also Mao's Last Dancer and the Power of One have helped to show me that with self belief, anything is possible.*

*Yes I do have friends and social acquaintances that come from different cultural backgrounds. It is not so much as coping with a difference, but more a situation of learning from each other and embracing these differences.*

*Yes I do think that I have gained tolerance of other people who have different cultures from me. These texts have helped in some way as they have exposed me to these differences and have helped me to see how cruelly some people of different races can be treated.*

The list of texts that student C01 cites are those that were class texts and the two as part of her Individual Reading Study: *Mao's Last Dancer* and *The Power of One*. The other two texts: *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Rabbit Proof Fence* were studied in the English class in Year Ten and Year Nine, respectively and the former being a novel. The film, *Rabbit Proof Fence* was studied exhaustively and became part of this research as presented in Chapter Four. The Individual Reading texts both deal with racism – one of a Chinese ballet dancer who defects to the United States and his endeavours to be accepted in the West; the other of white and black Africans in South Africa under the apartheid regime.

In *Mao's Last Dancer*, power over individualistic inclinations is clearly shown in the Chinese communist government of Mao Tse Tung who takes a young country boy, based only on his physique, to the city for intense training in ballet. It also reveals the persistence of the human spirit to excel, irrespective of poverty, hardships and the personal barriers experienced by the author Li Cunxin. This autobiography acutely describes the author's defection to the United States where he is able to express freely his artistic talents and courage. There, he also faces criticism and racism on a personal and political scale which he endures with some fortitude.

The second text, *The Power of One*, has similar themes to the above novel, and has some autobiographical elements of Bryce Courtenay's life growing up in South Africa.



However, the protagonist, Peekay, reveals the bullying he experiences whilst in a rural Afrikaans boarding school because he is of English background. This experience places him in good stead to empathize with the black population of apartheid in South Africa. Peekay fights against racism, prejudice and the ever threatening prominence of Nazism during the 1930s and 40s.

The Australian novel *Looking for Alibrandi* by Melina Marcheta reveals the Italian culture from which the protagonist, Josephine Alibrandi, attempts to culturally disassociate herself, yet comes to understand that her strength and support is intricately linked to her Italian family, in particular, her mother and grandmother. The search for her identity in an Anglo-Australian country leads her to important relationships which weave the themes in the text of strong family values, friendships, death and ultimately learning to accept her Italian culture and an Australian way of life. Josephine discovers that being ‘bivalent’ is quite possible.

To appreciate the student C01’s opinions on the influence which these texts have had upon her, it is necessary to examine the second paragraph of her comments, in which she states that this literature has “helped me to see a different view on life” from a “different cultural and societal view” and recognize the “prejudices that occur in the world, in particular racism”. This student personalizes her views by the three time repetition of the pronoun “me” and recognizes “different cultural” backgrounds which shows a sense of understanding the cultural other.

In the third paragraph the student states that she has “friends and social acquaintances that come from a different background”, although, does not state from what other cultural entities these friends and acquaintances originate. Her remarks flow quite fluently to her last sentence in this paragraph that “It is not so much as coping with a difference, but more a situation of learning from each other and embracing these differences”. This remark implies a deeper understanding of the ‘cultural other’ and in particular the choice of the word “embracing” which indicates a coming together as one people, irrespective of origin.

In the fourth and final paragraph, the student overtly indicates that the literary texts studied in English classes have helped her to gain “tolerance of other people who have different cultures from me.” The exposure to these texts has helped her to “see how cruelly some people of different races can be treated.” In essence, it reveals that literature has cognitively challenged her mind processes to identify and rationalize the injustices that occur toward the ‘cultural other’. As she states in the previous paragraph, the student has some “friends and social acquaintances” whose cultural entity is quite different than her own. Student C01 reveals a sense of Personally Positive attitudes in her understanding of those from different cultures, which is often indicated by the multiple use of pronouns “I” and “me” and can be attributed “in some way” to the literary texts to which she was “exposed” during her English classes.

In the case of student C02, the literature that has had an impact upon this student is quite different in genre to the previous student’s list of texts. She states the following:

**C02** *Poetry – Lines to Time; Veronika Decides to Die – Paulo Coelho; Girl Interrupted – Susanna Kaysen; One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest – Ken Kesey.*

*Poetry opened my eyes to many types of structures and many ideas. I enjoyed reading my individual reading texts as I love reading about mental institutions and dealing with being accepted into society and at the same time being excluded for being different.*

*Yes, as I learn about their background and even though they have their differences we are all the same – African, Greek, Irish.*

*Yes. Snow Falling on Cedars – judging Japanese before you know the facts. To Kill a Mockingbird – judging just because they are black.*

The text *Veronika Decides to Die* is a novel of a twenty four year old, Veronika, who begins her life with everything it has to offer. In this perfect life, she decides to commit suicide in which she is unsuccessful and becomes interned in a mental hospital in Villete. There, her relationships develop with other patients; the collectivity of this and the help of the head psychiatrist enable her to find appreciation of the world around her and life. Whilst she is in the hospital, Veronika finds the freedom to express an unreserved personality which helps define her identity.

As with the above novel, *Girl, Interrupted* also deals with mental illness of a young girl in a psychiatric hospital. The story is Susanna Kaysen’s memoir relating to her experiences in a psychiatric institution. She denies the attempt of suicide and is diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. Similarly to the experiences of Veronika of the above text, Susanna encounters patients and doctors that leave either a positive or negative influence upon her. The idea of what is sanity and what is not plays an important role throughout the novel. As an institutionalized patient she was marginalized from the so called “healthy” and “normal”.

On similar lines to the above two texts, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* deals with institutionalized processes in an asylum and their influences on the human mind. The tyrannical nurse Ratched exercises complete power over the inmates and in this regard reflects a personality that is parallel to Corporal Himmelstoss in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The protagonist, Randle McMurphy, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* endeavours to assert his individualistic rights in the asylum, but loses the battle in the end. The power struggle between McMurphy and Ratched, as well as the ethics of electroshock therapy, are main themes within the novel.

As summarized above, the student has chosen texts primarily of psychological themes and 'marginalized others'; the poetry text *Lines to Time* delves into a variety of subject matter and like an epiphany it "opened" the student's "eyes" to the meanings of "many ideas." It is of note that this student reveals a passion, a "love" in "reading" her particular choice of texts, which was made on the premise that they deal "with being accepted into society and at the same time being excluded for being different." Whether the student's implied meaning of acceptance and exclusion is only of people whose mental state is vulnerable needs to be analysed a little closer. It is of interest, however, that the language choice of this particular sentence incorporates "accepted" and "excluded" with the conjunction 'and' rather than 'or'. This same student in her previous statements on Italian immigrants and the short story revealed a disinclination to be overt with her own Italian identity. In contrast to student C13 who exposes her South African background in her remarks, student C02's responses were curt and cryptic at times. Perhaps "being accepted" and "being excluded" is also a reference to her own Italian background and it is

her way of expressing that she has experienced both exclusion and marginalization in an Anglo-Australian society.

In the third paragraph, the student does not refer to the Italian background, from which she originates, but makes reference to “African, Greek, Irish”, revealing a psychological disassociation from her Italian origins. Although she states that “we are all the same”, it does not stand comfortably with her personal experiences, or otherwise her comments would have been more open to her Italian culture, as with student C13 who overtly remarks on her heritage. Again in Year Twelve, some of her comments are terse and in their brevity they disallow the reader to gain an in depth knowledge of how the student thinks. However, she does reveal recognition of cultural “differences” and is willing to “learn about their background”.

A closer look at paragraph four reveals that the most important part of this question is omitted – “Explain how” some of these texts enables one to “become more tolerant”. The listing of the two texts and their themes does not explain the reasons of how the student gained tolerance toward others, through the study of the texts. Although the student states some positivities of attitudes in understanding the ‘cultural other’, there are signs of defensive use of language and omissions, as mentioned above, that can cause some doubt, in this case. On the other hand, she also remarks on her understanding of cultural differences and in this, attempts to balance a Personally Positive attitude with the universality view of “we are all the same”.

Unlike the student directly above, student C03 responds to the questions in more detail and reveals her opinions.

**C03** *Romeo and Juliet* – William Shakespeare; *Mao’s Last Dancer* – Li Cunxin; *Snow Falling on Cedars* – David Guterson; *Pride and Prejudice* – Jane Austen; *Wuthering Heights* – Emily Brontë.

[They] *Influenced my view of society and the world and taught me about various cultures and their customs. Also has made me aware of the diversity of the human race and the issues that society faces.*

*Yes. I have patience with them and try to have a greater understanding of them, their culture and their beliefs. I also attempt to put myself in their shoes and see the world from their perspective and understand the challenges they may face.*

*Yes I believe I have. “Mao’s Last Dancer” influenced me to understand that while on the outside people may appear different, on the inside we are all the same and that everyone faces challenges in their lives. “Pride and Prejudice” influenced me to not judge people and get to know them before making any decisions about them. “To Kill a Mockingbird” taught me to accept people of all cultures and to stand up for what I believe, no matter what society believes or values.*

Student C03’s responses to the questions reveal an understanding of the literary texts’ meanings which have influenced her attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’. Her choice of texts range from Years Ten, Eleven and Twelve and as with the students above, she has also chosen the two texts from her Individual Reading Study: *Pride and Prejudice* and *Wuthering Heights*. It is of note that both of these texts deal with the ‘marginalized other’, such as Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* who does not meet the social expectations of the aristocratic class to which Mr. Darcy belongs. In *Wuthering Heights* Heathcliff is cruelly cast aside as the ‘marginalized other’ and to a certain extent Catherine, by association with Heathcliff, is initially something of an outcast, until she is enticed by the civilities of upper middle class society. In many respects, these characters’

exclusion from society can also be interpreted as the lower class 'cultural other' living in different and dominant traditions.

In her second paragraph the student writes about the ways in which these literary texts have influenced her. She expands her answer to embrace a sense of belonging in a universal environment in which the literature "taught" her "about various cultures and their customs" and made her "aware of the diversity of the human race and the issues that society faces." The ability of this student to encompass a more collective view of the world and its problems demonstrates the power of the word and its multiple meanings.

However, in paragraph three, the extent of her comprehension of different cultures reveals mixed signals of condescension and an "attempt" to empathize. In the former case, it projects a sense of standing aside and looking on and showing "patience with them", a rather depersonalized term. The choice of the word "try" implies something of a struggle to come to terms in putting herself "in their shoes" to "see the world from their beliefs". It is not made clear whether this student understands the "challenges they may face" as different cultural entities and this suggests one who is an on-looker rather than one who wants to "embrace" cultural differences, as student C01 remarked.

In the last paragraph, she elaborates on each text's influence upon her where "on the outside people may appear different, on the inside we are all the same". In this she addresses the visibility of a person through the text *Mao's Last Dancer* where the protagonist, Li, is Chinese and not a white Anglo-Australian or European. She

universalizes her understanding of the ‘cultural other’ in “that everyone faces challenges in their lives” which are no different from hers or anyone else’s. Here also, the student’s response is devoid of cultural difference and understanding of the particular challenges that faced Li in *Mao’s Last Dancer*. The lesson of not being judgmental is learned through the text *Pride and Prejudice* where getting “to know them before making any decisions about them” is important. In the text *To Kill a Mockingbird* the student culminates all that she has understood from her readings and study of the literary texts in her clear analysis “to stand up for what I believe” and not be influenced by “what society believes or values”, but to simply “accept people of all cultures”. In this comment, the student universalizes her views with a Generally Positive attitude which reinforces the texts’ influences on her understanding of the ‘cultural other’.

The next student’s understanding of the ‘cultural other’ through the texts studied in class reveals his particular attitude as developed by student C12. The following are his comments:

**C12** *The Kite Runner - Kahled Hosseini; The Outsiders – S.E. Hinton*

*They provided me with views of other worlds which I would not have seen in my secluded world. I have gained a better insight into racism and prejudice within our world and the relationships between characters.*

*I am unaware of people who are greatly culturally different. At World Youth Day I met Brazilians, Canadians, French and Iranians. My English teacher is Greek, have a few Italian friends and a few from Japan.*

*The texts have provided a good view of prejudices, but also my own ranga prejudices have allowed me to accept, not tolerate, other cultures.*

The student remarks on two literary texts that have influenced him: *The Kite Runner* which was part of his Individual Reading Study and *The Outsiders* a Year Nine class text



for English. *The Kite Runner* reveals the prejudices against the ‘marginalized other’, Hassan, who unknowingly, is a sibling with the protagonist, Amir, a fact which only revealed mid-way into the novel. The horrendous act of sexual crime against this sibling remains as a psychological guilt element in the mind of the protagonist who witnesses these terrible events and does not right the wrong.

Similarly in *The Outsiders*, the gang warfare between the Greasers and Socs reveals its violence which leads to an accidental killing. The need to escape the judgemental finger of society, where people do not have all the information to make such incriminations, forces two of the main characters, Ponyboy and Johnny, to run away and hide in an abandoned church up on a mountain. They too become the ‘marginalized others’ and the plot goes on to show their courage in saving some school children in a fire, at the expense of Johnny’s life.

The choice of these texts “provided” the student “with views of other worlds” which he explains became possible to see “in my secluded world” through the literature. He admits to a confined environment from which he resides and remarks that he has now “gained a better insight into racism and prejudice within our world”. Unlike the immediate student above, C12, recognizes his cultural differences to others. He considers that has broadened his understanding of the ‘cultural other’ who is marginalized with “racism and prejudice”. His world has extended past the “secluded” one focused on the northern suburbs of Adelaide. This has become more of a reality through the literary

texts and his understanding of “the relationships between characters” which often reflect life, itself.

In his comments of the third paragraph, he writes candidly that he is “unaware of people who are greatly culturally different”, which reflects the reality of his own experience. However, he continues to explain his encounters with “Brazilians, Canadians, French and Iranians” during “World Youth Day”, which was held in Sydney, did offer him a momentary contact with the ‘cultural other’. It can be seen from his statements that the student was endeavouring to make some initial contact with the cultural other. He cites his “English teacher” who “is Greek” and here the teacher/researcher can comment that she makes an unlikely ‘typical’ Greek candidate upon whom the student can base a profile of the ‘cultural other’, although, he has discerned some form of cultural differences in her. It is similar with his other “few Italian friends and a few from Japan” who do not quite fit the form of long-standing cultural friendships. The teacher knows of one Italian friend from the class, C02, who projects no likely candidature for authentic Italian traditions, particularly within the school environment. As for the Japanese friends, there was at the time, an exchange Japanese student who was in the Pastoral Care class of the teacher/researcher. Student C12 did have a friendly relationship with this student whilst he was at the school, six to nine months. It would be safe to construe that the use of the word a “few”, Italian and Japanese friends, is a something of an exaggeration, based on the student’s own words that he was “unaware of people who are greatly culturally different.” However, it must be noted that this student goes a long way further than most of the others in his awareness of the reality of cultural differences and

recognizes that his friendships have not explored these. Furthermore, he has come much further in cultural understanding than student C03, who often states conventional platitudes.

Despite the limitations of personal experience, the literary texts, “have provided a good view of prejudices”. As he states in the fourth paragraph, his personal experiences with prejudice are that he is a “ranga”. This is a colloquial term for a person who has red hair and accordingly may be used as a teasing tool to annoy such a person. The experience of this form of “prejudices” has allowed the student “to accept, not tolerate, other cultures.” This shows the importance of personal experience of injustices in the form of prejudice, which fosters greater understanding of the ‘cultural other’.

Unlike the above student whose experience of the ‘cultural other’ was limited, yet more than most of the others, student C13 has experienced what it is like to be culturally different.

**C13** *A Dry White Season – André Brink; The Tomorrow series – John Marsden.*

*André Brink’s ‘A Dry White Season’ showed me the power that anger and racism have to destroy. Not only the novel itself, but also the fight that André Brink had to endure to have his novel published in South Africa. His success taught me that as long as you believe in a cause and in yourself, you can persist through anything. John Marsden, a brilliant author, through his texts and the characters which he creates, was able to make me appreciative for all that I have. The plethora of emotions which he manages to elicit from his audience is unlike that of anything I, personally, have come upon. Marsden was able to, for me, turn an ‘on-again-off-again’ relationship with reading into a full blown obsession.*

*I, myself, am of a different cultural background, that being Italian-French decent, born African-American living as an Australian citizen. (Try saying that 7 times fast). [A smiley face with the tongue hanging out was drawn after the previous sentence]. As a child, my family was a lot more strict about going out with friends*

*or sleeping over. Not much has changed.* [Another smiley face with the tongue hanging out was drawn after the last sentence].

*I have always been brought up to accept others for who and what they are and not to expect that everyone should walk, talk, dress and breathe as I do. The novels and texts that I have been studying for the past four years has only reinforced that.*

One of the texts that student C13 has mentioned was chosen for her Individual Reading Study: *A Dry White Season*. It can be understood why the student was drawn to this text as she is from South Africa and the narrative of the novel, which primarily, is set in South Africa, focuses on the theme of racism. The other texts, *The Tomorrow* series, venture into main themes of love, hate, war and prejudice. John Marsden's novels were able to help the student with a personal "on-again-off-again relationship", but she does not expand in detail what the "emotions" are that the author "manages to elicit from his audience". It is clearer that *A Dry White Season* has been able to show the student "the power that anger and racism have to destroy." In this regard she is able to identify with the racism and destruction that has occurred in South Africa and the hardships the author had to "endure to have his novel published in South Africa." To "believe in a cause and yourself" taught the student persistence in life.

The student makes clear in the third paragraph that she is of a 'different cultural background' and many nationalities make up this cultural family difference. She then reflects on her childhood where her "family was a lot more strict about going out with friends or sleeping over." This has obviously left a mark on her mind for the recollection to take place and for her to write it as part of her comments which she shares. As for the smiley faces with the tongue hanging out, it may be a symbol that she is just joking; on

the other hand, many jokes reveal a serious side to a meaning. Whichever way one wants to interpret these smiley faces, the content of the sentences, particularly the last one, reveals a more serious side than she wishes to admit.

As the student reveals her culturally diverse background, it is easy to understand why she was “brought up to accept others for who and what they are”. She continues to explain that her family taught her not to expect “that everyone should walk, talk, dress and breathe as I do.” To this she adds that the texts which she studied “for the past four years has only reinforced that” sentiment in her life. It is quite possible that the student and or her family have experienced some hardships concerning the mixed cultural backgrounds and in this she is able to empathize with others of different cultures. Visibly the student is white and the “African-American” descent, if indeed, it means that there is a black African ancestry, is quite recessive in nature. The student’s comments are consistent with her previous remarks and reveal a positive attitude and a deeper Personal Understanding of the ‘cultural other’ reinforced by the literary texts studied in the English classrooms.

Unlike the previous student, C15’s choice of texts are multiple and more diverse.

**C15** *To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee; Romeo and Juliet – William Shakespeare; The Outsiders – S.E. Hinton; Rabbit Proof Fence – Phillip Noyce; Looking for Alibrandi - Melina Marcheta.*

*Became more aware of the differences between cultures and more understanding.*

*Chinese people. There isn’t much difference, and being an Australian, grow up to accept multiculturalism.*

*Most of the texts explain about tolerance or intolerance of different cultures and the intolerance is unjust and makes the reader want to NOT emulate the prejudice.*

The texts that the student lists are from Years Nine and Ten. *The Outsiders* as a novel was studied in Year Nine and the themes of prejudice, gang warfare and dysfunctional families were some of the themes that revealed a prejudiced and judgemental society in which these gangs of youths lived and fought. Another Year Nine text was the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* which the students viewed and analysed in-depth. This visual text was studied in detail and presented in Chapter Four. The novels *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Looking for Alibrandi* were taught in Year Ten and the students read and analysed them in a thorough manner. *Looking for Alibrandi* focused on the Italian culture in Sydney and the hardships a single mother endures to bring up her daughter as an educated young woman. In turn, Josephine Alibrandi struggles to accept the tight control that the Italian culture inculcates in her life. Prejudice, racism and family values are prevalent within the novel. As *To Kill a Mockingbird*, similar themes apply, but with the added importance of being true to one's beliefs and values, which is the protagonist, Atticus' maxim in life. The other text the student chose is Shakespeare's classic play, *Romeo and Juliet* studied in Year Ten; it defines the 'marginalized other', Romeo and Juliet, in a dramatic and violent manner. The oxymoronic 'bitter/sweet' thematic strands that culminate in love/hate tragedies of individuals and families, respectively, become a source of societal and psychological learning for the students.

The student's response to the second question consists of one sentence and is curtly addressed. However, she does state that these texts have changed her way of thinking by making her "more aware of the differences between cultures" and they have contributed to a greater "understanding" of the issues the literary texts portray. In the third paragraph

the student states that the people she knows who originate from a different culture are Chinese. She does not elaborate in detail on this information, other than to say that “there isn’t much difference”, presumably between the Chinese living in Australia and Australians. Perhaps from a social point of view, within shared public domains, the difference may appear negligible, however, within a Chinese home, their culture may prevail in their way of life. It is not clear on what terms this student knows “Chinese people”, however, it may be that they work together and this has brought them in contact with each other. She concludes the paragraph that “being an Australian” she has grown up “to accept multi-culturalism” and she infers that there are no problems, as far as she is concerned, with that.

In the final paragraph, the student’s sentiments toward the ‘cultural other’ reflect her Positivity of Attitude and “tolerance” that the “texts explain” to her about “different cultures” and that “makes the reader want to NOT emulate the prejudice.” It is of note that the word “NOT” is in upper case and underlined to emphasize her personal understanding of the meaning of tolerance. She does not use any personal pronouns in her comments and her remarks are short and to the point. The positive inference here is, however, that she has gained some deeper understanding of the ‘cultural other’ by reading the literary texts and analysing them in the English classrooms.

As with the direct student above, C19 writes with some economy of words in response to the four questions. He states that:

**C19** *Snow Falling on Cedars – David Guterson; Rabbit Proof Fence – Phillip Noyce.*

*It shows the wrong doings of the world and has given me some strong morals.*

*Yes – I cope fine. They are the same as me but different appearance.*

*No, I have been brought up to accept anyone who is of good nature. The texts, however, has shown me the harshness which people have placed on others.*

The student lists only two texts which he feels have influenced him in relationship to understanding the ‘cultural other’. *Snow Falling on Cedars* is a Year Twelve novel which the students studied in class and it reveals the injustices toward the Japanese-Americans living in the United States, especially during World War Two. The prejudice shown toward them, leads to a Japanese fisherman being charged with murder. As indicated in Chapter Four, the study of the visual text *Rabbit Proof Fence* was part of the Year Nine class study about three Aboriginal girls who walk 1500 kilometres along the Rabbit Proof Fence erected in Australia. Their aim was to return to their families in Northern Australia and escape the unjust authoritarian treatment by the white population.

Both of the above texts reveal to the student “the wrong doings of the world” which influences the student to develop “some strong morals”. Furthermore, he states in the third paragraph that he “cope[s] fine” with friends or acquaintances of different cultural backgrounds. He continues to explain that “they are the same as me but different appearance”, but there is no explanation as to the cultural background of these particular friends. In the brief response to the last question in the fourth paragraph, the student does not feel that the texts have helped him to become more tolerant. The reason he gives is that he has “been brought up to accept anyone who is of good nature.” In his opinion, the texts have shown him the “harshness which people have placed on others”. This, as he states in the second paragraph, has given him “strong morals”.



There are Generally Positive attitudes within this student's writing, albeit presented with some brevity of expression. Both texts have opened his imagination to understandings of other countries, such as, the United States and Japan, their cultures and relationships to each other. Similarly, the injustices of "the world" can be found right here in Australia in the mistreatment of the indigenous Aboriginals who suffered under the rule of the white people that settled in this country. These are excellent lessons for the student to learn and his "world" was extended, past his own environment. There is a personal element in the choice of his language, yet it does not denote much personal significance for him. This may account for the inexperience he has in any interrelationships with people from different cultures. It would be safe to say that, so far, the student has gained Knowledge and Understanding of peoples, other than those with whom he associates and knows, through the reading and study of the literary texts at school.

Unlike the student immediately above, student C21 lists several texts that have had an influence upon her. She comments the following:

**C21** *To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee; Looking for Alibrandi – Melina Marchetta; Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen; Romeo and Juliet (film) – Baz Luhrmann; Angela's Ashes – Frank McCourt; Rabbit Proof Fence – Phillip Noyce.*

*Each of these texts have influenced me in different ways. They have informed me and many of the texts have had the prominent idea of racism which has changed my way of thinking.*

*Yes, I have many friends from different cultural backgrounds. I cope well because Australia is a very multicultural country, so it is very easy.*

*To Kill a Mockingbird and Rabbit Proof Fence both allowed me to gain more tolerance of different cultures. They allowed me a different perspective on cultural difference, and made me more understanding.*

Two of the texts the student has chosen were part of her Individual Reading Study: *Pride and Prejudice* and *Angela's Ashes*. These two texts were studied as contrasts where the former text deals with the upper middle classes and the aristocracy, but the latter describes the abject poverty of the lower working class context of an Irish family; the protagonist eventually emigrates from Ireland to America for a better future. In both of these texts the protagonists are 'marginalized others', albeit, in extremely different environments. As for the visual text, Baz Luhrmann's modern adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, it attracts the younger generation as a classic tale of family feuds, revenge, hate, fate and violence. The film clearly shows the inability to accept another from a different family clan and this results in death and destruction – these repercussions become counter-productive. The other texts she cites have been addressed in other students' analysis by the researcher.

The student confirms that "these texts have influenced me in different ways" and the theme of "racism" in most of the above texts "has changed my way of thinking." The texts had the affect of acting as sources of information which helped the student in the processing and understanding of their meanings and especially the "idea of racism". This student also states that she has "many friends from different cultural backgrounds", but does not give specificities. She copes well with these cultural differences "because Australia is a very multicultural country" and this makes it "very easy". This last phrase can be seen as an overstatement; learning, understanding and empathizing with others from different cultures is not, in practical terms, "very easy" unless the relationship is based on mainstream cultural terms. To move beyond this requires one to enter the realm

of the ‘other’ and experience the culture, first hand, to enable a person to appreciate and comprehend the differences and similarities of other cultures. In the fourth paragraph, she reinforces the same sentiments, but uses two different texts that have “allowed” her “to gain more tolerance of different cultures”: *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Both of these texts have been addressed in some of the other students’ analysis of their data.

The student’s experience through the narratives of the texts studied in the English classes, reveals a Generally Positive attitude toward the ‘cultural other’. The student states that she, too, has “many friends” of “different cultural backgrounds”, however, she does not elaborate on this point. One way this can be construed is that by Year Twelve, so many of the students have gained employment to meet their expenses of having mobile phones, social commitments and petrol for their car, which have become absolute essentials for young teenagers, that in doing so they have come into contact with people of other cultures. The other reason may also be that their independent mobility brings them into contact with a lot more people of various cultures outside of their original environment. In all, the student gains a depth of understanding through the reading and study of these literary texts, to the extent that she has become aware of a change in herself.

Student C29 chose classic and complex literary texts that have influenced him during his studies in English classes. The following are his comments on the four questions:

**C29** *Crime and Punishment* – Fyodor Dostoevsky; *As I Lay Dying* – William Faulkner.

*C&P opened new existentialist avenues of thought, allowing for new perspectives. However, this was balanced by almost nihilistic ideals put forward by Faulkner. These two texts have heavily altered my approach to literature and life.*

*Yes, many of my friends range in religion and culture. I usually cope with this by looking for similarities.*

*No I don't think this is an ideal that can be effectively expressed out of the confounds of cliché. Literature is most certainly an introspective experience, however, tolerance is not an aspect of my personality that has been increased. As Dostoevsky once put it "a man is a product of his environment", however, I don't particularly think this extends to literature.*

Both of the texts that the student chose to show that they have had an influence upon him are the ones he used for the Individual Reading Study. These classic novels of the literary Canon have inspired the student to look deeper into the thoughts of the authors and their characters. His linguistic choice of "existentialist" and "nihilistic ideals" reveals the student's ability to excel in his comprehension of people's responsibility of their own actions which lead to their growth and future. To have learned similar lessons from these two texts has altered his "approach to literature and life". It is then of no surprise when in the third paragraph he states that "Yes" he has "many" "friends" who are different in "religion and culture", although he does not elaborate on this. The way the student copes with this difference is "by looking for similarities" in people who have various other cultures than his own.

In the final paragraph the student endeavours to consider whether he has gained tolerance for people with different cultures by reading the literary texts. He states "No" and explains his position. At times he is lost in his own "ideal" and is unsure in relation to the question. If "literature" is an "introspective experience" which is gained from his educational "environment", then he, as "a man is a product of his environment". Perhaps

the student here was trying to be a little philosophical and did not quite place it in context; he did, however, state in the second paragraph that the literature studied in the English classes for the Individual Reading Study “altered his approach to literature and life.”

It can be seen from this student’s remarks that his analytic tendencies have drawn him to speculate and learn about people and life in a deeper understanding of literature and those around him. His Generally Positive attitude toward the ‘cultural other’ was influenced by these two texts in a more philosophical way than his peers, but he seems to feel more comfortable with the universals in human nature, rather than their cultural differences.

### **6.3.2 Theory Link to Data**

In psychological terms, the Year Twelve class culture was dictated, to a certain degree, by the literary texts studied in the classroom. Vygotsky was interested in the relationship “between thought, word and meaning” where he was influenced by von Humboldt who said that “Language . . . is an activity (*Energia*) and not a product (*Ergon*). He also claimed that ‘thought and language are . . . one and inseparable from each other’” (in Hardcastle 2009, p. 182). For Rosenblatt, the students’ *aesthetic reading* and study of the literary text created the *transactional experience* between the reader and the text, which influenced their ‘thoughts’ through the analysis and richness of reading ‘words’, which gave ‘meaning’ to their particular environment and life. By virtue of the students’ choice and variety of English literature that they studied in this final year of secondary school, it reveals the confidence with which they experienced their texts. These ranged from the

Year Nine level, such as, *The Outsider*, to *Crime and Punishment* outside the Year Twelve curriculum. Many of the texts were studied in various year levels in the English class, yet others were selected by the students themselves for the compulsory task in their final year. The students applied an ‘aesthetic’ reading to the texts which activated their ‘thought[s] and language’ to create a unique experience of Knowledge and Understanding.

The Year Twelve students’ personal choice reflected the influence these texts had upon each of them and their remarks connect to the theoretical concepts of sociologists, educationists and psychologists. One of the examples which positively show how sociological theory acts out in practical terms is from student C13. Within her data she states that the Australian author John “Marsden was able to, for me, turn an ‘on-again-off-again’ [personal] relationship with reading into a full blown obsession.” Marsden was also able to “elicit” a “plethora of emotions” from the student which helped her by reading one of Marsden’s novels about a personal obsessive relationship which she was experiencing at the time.

This example of C13 shows how the cultural system of the English classroom is the place where the interpretation of the English literary text involves feelings, emotions and a creative process which stimulates higher mental development. Vygotsky’s *scientific concepts* can be applied in this process to elicit knowledge and understanding in the many themes and characterisations that abound in literature. Some of the themes studied by the students were racism and prejudice or tolerance and acceptance of the ‘cultural other’.

This learning entails formal school instruction which takes place in a systematic classroom environment. This concept is what Vygotsky terms the *zone of proximal development* where the educator, as facilitator, assists the students with reasoning to understand the meanings as extrapolated from the literary texts. Within the students' imagination changes occur which evoke deeper mental functions of cognition. For this to transpire, the educationist theory of Rosenblatt is imperative to understanding the child's ability to elicit the meanings from the study of "literature [which] provides a *living through*, not simply *knowledge about*: not the fact that lovers have died young and fair, but a living through of *Romeo and Juliet*" (Rosenblatt 2005, p.38).

It can be seen, therefore, that the combination and creation of the cultural environment in the English class of academia encourages the student to heuristically engage with the literary texts which Vygotsky terms as "cultural tools". The aid of the teacher as the proximal "adult" supports the student's endeavours through *aesthetic reading* and a *living through experience*, which allows, for example C13, to 'reflect' upon what she learned and create the right conditions for 'mastery' of the literary texts and their meanings. The student's ability to transfer this learning to her personal relational problem can best be described that she achieved what Vygotsky terms as 'higher psychological functions'.

The above theory corroborates the students' data and results of this research. The progression, for example, of students C12 and C19's understandings and attitudes from Year Ten to Year Twelve is a case in point. By the end of Year Ten's study of the short story and other texts they had acquired No Understanding of the Italian culture. Through

Year Eleven's work with the novel and poetry, and on to Year Twelve's study of texts, such as, *Snow Falling on Cedars*, their attitudes toward the 'cultural other' had matured and progressed well toward Generally Positive, more so with C12 than C19. (See Chart 6.1). Considering the monocultural aspect of the students' home life, school and environs, it is encouraging to see how well the students syncretized that external element of their culture with the richer cultural classroom environment during English lessons, of which the literary texts played such an important role.

#### **6.4 Conclusion of Chapter Six**

By Year Eleven, the students began to show more understanding about the 'cultural other' as seen in their positive attitudes toward the text *All Quiet on the Western Front*, by Erich Maria Remarque, and the war poems of Wilfred Owen, in particular, *Insensibility*. One of the important lessons learned from the texts was the commonality of hardships, joys, comradeship, abuse of power and struggle to survive on the war and home front. On one level, humanity's experiences of life whether at war or home are universal to all, whether one is from Germany or Britain. On another level, as Znaniecki would argue, the universal needs for home, basic safety and comfort are common, but they are manifested and expressed in culturally different ways. The acknowledgement and understanding of these cultural differences has the tendency to pave the way toward deeper comprehensibility of the similarities that are shared by humanity when placed in the same environment, such as, war. This deeper understanding affects attitudes in a positive manner towards the 'cultural or marginalized other'.



Having studied and discussed the texts, the students were able to discern issues that were shared by both the British and German soldiers and more importantly they were able to relate to the 'marginalized other' and transfer that to today's people who suffer abuse from others that have power over them. Some of these vulnerable young people were identified by the students as 'cultural others' who find it difficult to assimilate into a dominant group, or find it difficult for others to understand their culture.

During these discussions the students displayed a sense of sympathy and empathy toward the various groups at school and in the community where they were marginalized because of their culture or appearance, which at times was visibly different to the dominant Anglo-Australian culture at school and around the habitual environments. The participant students in this research were open to questions and suggestions which became thought provoking discussions. The majority of the students' attitudes leaned toward the positivity for the 'cultural other' as a marginalized person and many constructive comments from the students made the discussions lively and relevant about the multicultural communities in Australia.

These particular positive attitudes toward the 'cultural other' were more highly defined in the students' Year Twelve written data. The broad range texts that the students chose to comment on represent the literary influences upon them. There are references to Year Nine texts in the Year Twelve students' comments of the issues that were addressed in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* about indigenous Aboriginals in Australia and *The Outsiders* about gang warfare.

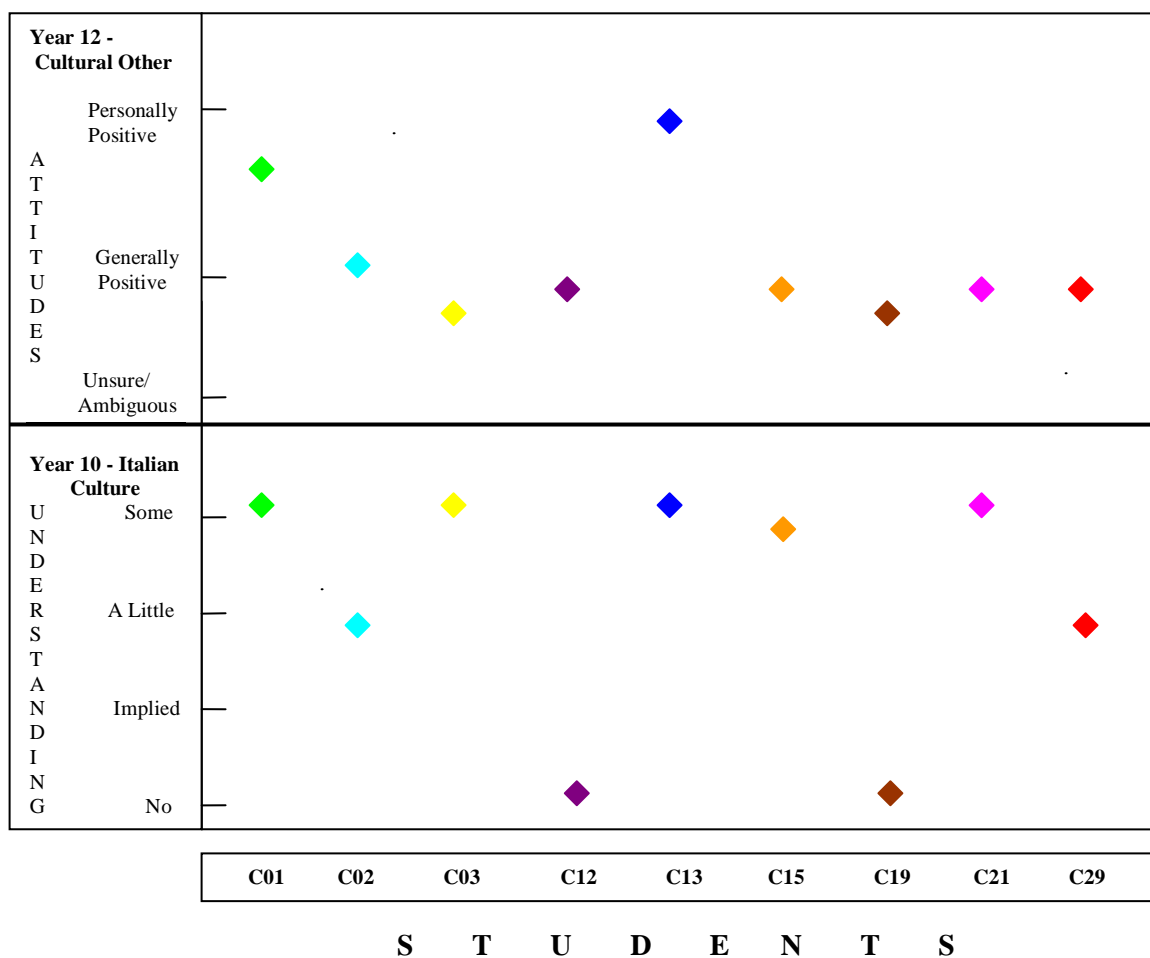


C19, is a little below the Generally Positive, but still within that range leading towards the highest bench mark. The brief remarks of this student reveal that the literature he chose showed him the “harshness” of people that is “placed on others”. Four students, C03, C15, C21 and C29 have attained the Generally Positive attitudes necessary to better understand the ‘cultural other’. Student C12 has passed the Generally Positive mark on the chart which discloses that his comments suggest an understanding of the cultural differences between others and himself. One explanation for this could be that he has personally experienced a form of prejudice because of his red hair, for which he was called ‘ranga’.

In the lower Personally Positive range, student C02 recognizes the cultural differences that often define people. However, she, surreptitiously, tries to balance that with her own Italian background connected to the literary texts that have influenced her understanding of the ‘cultural other’ through her implied written remarks. In a clearer way, Graph 6.1 shows student C01 almost reaching the highest bench mark in the Personally Positive attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’, by personalizing her comment with a liberal use of personal pronouns and positive linguistic choice in her remarks. The most Personally Positive statements came from student C13 who reflects upon her own culture from South Africa and understands the cultural differences from others whom she does not expect to “walk, talk . . . and breathe” as she does. This understanding of the ‘cultural other’ is based on her personal experiences; the majority of other students have no access to similar experiences.

The Chart, below, compares the Year Ten with the Year Twelve results in the students' Understanding and Attitudes toward the 'cultural other', over this period of time.

**CHART 6.1**                    **YEARS TEN AND TWELVE INDIVIDUAL UNDERSTANDING AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE 'CULTURAL OTHERS'**



The Year Ten and Twelve students' Understanding and Attitudes, respectively, are plotted individually for each student. To demonstrate to what extent the Year Twelve students gained positive attitudes towards the 'cultural other', it was necessary to show at what level of understanding of the Italian culture the Year Ten students reached and then how much further they progressed in Year Twelve. The Year Eleven stage is omitted

from the Chart because the students did not provide written comments and the research was a 'memoir' from the teacher/researcher. However, it was noted during the discussions with the Year Elevens that their positivity towards the 'cultural other' had matured in their understanding and there were some encounters with others from different cultures. This enabled the Year Eleven students to form empathy and develop an understanding that enriched their attitudes toward the 'cultural other'.

There was a purposeful omission of the results of the Year Nine study from the above Chart 6.1, and consideration was taken regarding the younger age of this group of students and obvious lack of other cultural interactions in their lives. In the senior years of Ten, Eleven and Twelve, the students were able to demonstrate a more mature attitude toward the 'cultural other' which included their ability to become individually mobile, with regard to work and transport. Their comments were balanced more equitably at that stage of their growth and learning. However, by simply making an eye scan of the results of the Year Nine investigation, it can easily be seen how exceptionally well these particular nine students have developed a sense of positive attitudes toward people from other cultures by the final senior year. The Year Nine investigation was vast in volume and specific in its subject matter that it stands on its own merit as an in-depth study of the students' development in understanding and attitudes towards the indigenous Australians.

Overall, the research over the four school years investigated that the attitudes of the students is commensurate with their understanding of other cultures and how people live within these other environments. The more a student understands the intricacies of the

various cultural people in Australia and, of greater importance, the more a student interacts within these cultures, the greater their personal positivity to their attitudes towards such people. In the absence of this personal experience, the research demonstrates that literary texts act as a source of imaginative interactions with the ‘cultural other’ for the students.

The Years Ten and Twelve Chart 6.1 shows that student C01 has gained Some Understanding after studying and analysing the short story *Identity* in Year Ten. By Year Twelve she shows that her attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’ have risen very close to Personally Positive and in some areas attained that personal perspective through the reading of the chosen English literary texts studied in class, such as, *Mao’s Last Dancer* and *The Power of One*. There is recognition by the student that these texts, as she says, “have exposed me to these differences” in cultures.

Although student C02 originates from an Italian background, she is hesitant to make this fully overt in her comments, both in Year Ten and Year Twelve. Her understanding of the Italian culture, after the reading, writing and discussions of the short story *Identity*, is shown as Implied Understanding. In her post-short story comments, she is clearly not disposed to exposing her Italian origins and her remarks are somewhat different in her analysis of the story. However, sufficient information was given to place her understanding at the level shown on the chart and reveal, with her comments on the texts chosen for Year Twelve, an indication that she was just slightly above Generally Positive in her attitudes by that stage.

The understanding gained by student C03 in Year Ten, after the study of the short story, demonstrates that she had Some Understanding of the Italian culture. This developed over the three years to reach Generally Positive attitudes towards the ‘cultural other’ in Year Twelve. In this student’s case, there was a lack of interaction with people from different cultures and much of her understanding and attitudes were attained through the meanings of the literary texts studied in the English classes. In contrast, student C12 had No Understanding of persons from the Italian culture In Year Ten, yet developed the sensibility in Year Eleven and Twelve to reach the Generally Positive attitudes in the final year at school. The choice of his Year Twelve text *The Kite Runner* and the fact that he personally experienced prejudice enabled the student to develop understanding and attitudes that were Generally Positive.

Of all the students, C13 had a clearer definition of the ‘cultural other’ and the differences that separate them from others. In Year Ten she indicated that she had Some Understanding of the Italian culture and this was also developed in Year Eleven. By virtue of her South African background and her experiences with people from different cultures, where she was “brought up to accept others for who and what they are”, she was able to empathize and reveal Personally Positive attitudes for the ‘cultural other’ in Year Twelve.

In Year Ten, student C15 reveals that she had gained Some Understanding of the Italian culture through the short story narrative and identified the irony of the story with her own words and expression. The development of this understanding reached Year Twelve,

whereby, her remarks showed that there was an absence of the personal attitude, which was indicated by the lack of any personal pronouns used. However, she was Generally Positive with her comments and in her attitude. In contrast, student C19 revealed in Year Ten that he had No Understanding of the Italian culture. However, similarly to student C15, he was able to identify the irony in the story with his own particular words rather than as a precise literary technique. His progression through to Year Twelve shows that his attitude toward the ‘cultural other’, through the reading and studying of the chosen texts, have “given” him “some strong morals”. It is commensurate with his understanding that he achieved a Generally Positive attitude toward the ‘cultural other’.

Student C21 shows that in Year Ten she was able to have Some Understanding of the Italian culture and better than most other students of the fictional character, Jonathon’s, personal cultural dilemma. It is important to note here that the student reached this understanding, not through personal experience, such as with student C13, but through the study of the literary texts. By Year Twelve she is able to profess that the literary texts allowed her “a different perspective on cultural difference, and made me more understanding”. In the depth of this understanding she was able to translate it into Generally Positive attitudes through Year Eleven and Year Twelve. In some different ways, student C29 revealed in his writing during Year Ten that he had A Little Understanding of the Italian culture after studying the short story *Identity*. Between that time and through to Year Twelve he was able to attain Generally Positive attitudes. He acquired “many friends who range in religion and culture” and through the study of the English literature he found “an introspective experience”. All of the above results are



based on a qualitative approach using *memoir* from the teacher/researcher in Year Eleven and *written statements* from the students in Year Twelve.

## **Chapter Seven - Conclusion - The Aesthetic Study of Literary Texts, Students' Understanding and Attitudes Toward the 'Cultural Other'**

The previous three chapters have discussed the responses of a small group of students, in an English class, to the in-depth aesthetic reading of literary texts portraying social themes and the experiences of characters who were culturally different than the students. Their comments illustrate the extent to which their reading became a transactional experience, enabling them to identify in imagination with the 'cultural other'.

The data for this qualitative research consisted of the students' personal writings in response to open-ended questions about English literary texts studied in Years 9, 10 and 12, as well as the teacher/researcher's memoir about the students' learning during the Year 11 text studies. The prime focus of analysis was to understand the meanings which the students gave to those literary texts and their influence upon the students' attitudes to the 'cultural other'. The investigation included four year level studies extending over four years of English classes, as the students advanced from Year Nine to Year Twelve.

### **7.1 Significance of the Use of Theories**

This research relied on the use of three complementary theoretical frameworks to establish the research aims, the method adopted and the analysis of data. The importance of the Conceptual Framework in Diagram 2.2 shows the theories that were used as an application to the student's written data to obtain an explication of his or her literary texts' meanings about the 'cultural other' and or 'marginalised other'. From the outset, the establishment of sociology as a theory was imperative to ascertain what *values and*

*attitudes* the students brought to the English classroom. Emanating from a monocultural environment, the students came to the classroom with ‘pre-existing’ *values and attitudes* which were appropriated through home, school and or other social organisations. The *humanistic sociology*, expounded by Znaniecki, served well to explicate the student as an individual dependent upon ‘social organisation’ and culture, and vice versa. This meant it became difficult for some individuals to ‘cross borders’ into other cultures where meaning and understanding transforms attitudes.

There were no noticeable differences in cultural activation among the participants. A couple of students whose background originated from Italy and South Africa were only made evident through their written comments. Bauman’s ‘group’ theory was applicable for these two students who seemed to find it more convenient and effective to assimilate within the majority Anglo-Australian culture, as part of the *in-group*, rather than risk rejection and marginalisation as the *out-group* within the school.

As this was such a difficult activation, to ‘cross borders’ from a monocultural ‘social organisation’ to a multicultural ‘social organisation’, it was dependent upon the cultural value of the literary text to assist students in this transition. To elicit the valuable meanings from the English literary text and acquire extended and new values, it was necessary to engage the students, with what Rosenblatt calls *aesthetic reading* of the text. This in-depth reading allowed the student to connect with the meanings of the narrative in a *transactional experience* between reader and text. Rosenblatt’s educational theory was complementary to Vygotsky’s ideas.

The significance of in-depth reading and connection of the reader to the text is vital to explicate Vygotsky's *semiotic mediators*, such as, literary works which act as 'psychological tools'. Apart from the word itself, in the text, the grammatical and schematic organisation of the literary text adds meaning for the development of 'higher mental processes' of the student's mind. However, each student brings to the English classroom *spontaneous concepts* or 'everyday' pre-existing attitudes which are acquired informally, usually, through family and other groups, such as, church, sporting, working 'group organisations'. In contrast, within the formal English classroom environment where learning, teaching and interaction occur, the *scientific concepts* offered were shown from the student's post-text written statements and positive attitudes toward the 'cultural other' to have been appropriated. It is within this environment of formal teaching where the *zone of proximal development* transpires and the teacher assists the student to develop within the mind's *imagination* positive attitudes towards those who are marginalised or of different cultures.

It is important to reiterate that in the holistic approach to the students' data, sociological, educational and psychological theories were essential to use if the analysis of data was to provide understanding of how student attitudes changed. Where Znaniecki omits certain sociological points, Rosenblatt supplements the educational emphasis of how things are achieved in the classroom and Vygotsky supplies the dynamic process to understand how the 'higher mental developments' of the mind produce a change in the attitudes of the students. There cannot be a separation of the cultural life from educational experiences or psychological processes of a human being. Diagram 2.2 showed how these theories were

integrated into the process of analysis in Years Nine and Ten studies. In this concluding chapter, the same approach is used again to judge the extent of change in the students' understanding of and attitudes to the 'cultural other' over the four years of this research.

## **7.2 How Far the Research Achieved Its Aims**

The majority of the aims of this research were achieved. The overall intention was to give the students the opportunity to 'experience' the 'cultural other' through the provision, study and analysis of literary texts whose ideas and meanings became relevant to the students' understanding and attitudes toward the 'cultural other' and 'marginalized other'. As the majority of students were immersed in a monocultural environment, in school, home and elsewhere, the question being investigated was whether the literary texts could become the next best medium for the students to experience another culture, albeit in their imagination. Would the students' in-depth reading and interpretation of the literary text, in the English classroom, enable the students' imagination to cognitively interact with themes and fictional characters within the texts? Could this become the substitution for 'actual experience' with the 'cultural other' since the reality was that the students had very little or no interactive association with people of cultures other than their own.

The success of this aim was revealed in the way the written comments of the students changed over the four years of the research. In the Year Nine study the students showed dramatic results of their understanding and attitudes toward the Aboriginals as the 'cultural other'. The distance between their knowledge, understanding and attitudes in

the pre-film data to the post-film data was sufficiently great, for the majority of the students, to warrant the term ‘dramatic’ results (see Chart 4.1). In the following year, the participants of the Year Ten study were reduced from twenty-two to nine students. Although this number was much lower in comparison to the previous year, the research for this same group of students spanned between Years Ten to Twelve and provided more in-depth analytical results for the aims of this research. It can be seen from the results of this year group that there were more students who revealed ‘A Little or Some Understanding’ toward the Italians, as the ‘cultural other’ than in the study of the previous year.

In the Years Eleven and Twelve studies, the data revealed a more uniform scale of understanding and attitudes. Gone were the ‘dramatic’ results of Year Nine and some of the irregular results of Year Ten. The Year Eleven students verbalized prevalence toward positive analysis of the two texts as recalled in the teacher/researcher’s *memoir*. The Year Eleven discussions in this classroom were thoughtful and evaluated the issues with in-sight and sensitivity toward the ‘cultural or marginalized other’. By Year Twelve the important aspect was the type of texts the students selected to write about and analyse. The majority of these literary texts addressed themes, characterizations and cultures of different peoples from different worlds. The students’ written comments were Generally Positive and some Personally Positive which showed their maturation in cognitive thinking that was activated in their positive attitudes toward the ‘cultural others’. As the graphs, diagrams and charts show, particularly Chart 6.1, the majority of students’ responses to the ‘cultural other’ shifted over the four years toward a Positivity of

Attitudes with a considerable Depth of Understanding about people from different cultures whose behaviour and traditions were, initially, unfamiliar to the students. It is important to comment that as a small scale qualitative study these findings cannot be generalised to other secondary school students or school contexts.

Moreover, there can be no conclusive indication from this study that the students had actually achieved positive personal interactions with the 'cultural other' by the end of Year Twelve, although some of the data did reveal fleeting interaction with people of other cultures. This occurred, primarily, in a few students' part-time work place where some interaction took place between a customer who spoke minimal English and student; or in a sporting venue where football or basketball provided coincidental meetings with a 'cultural other' who shared the same sporting interest. This research was only able to establish the activation of the students' attitudes as expressed in their written comments derived from their imaginations. How far the students activated their attitudes to incorporate actual interaction with the 'cultural other' could only be determined with additional data from their experiences after they left school, for example in the tertiary educational level. All of the participants in this research entered their choice of further studies at a university in the city.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

In light of the positive results analysed from the students' written data, further research on this topic from schools of single gender, where the heuristic concepts could be applied to discover similar or different results, might be juxtaposed with the results in this thesis

to expand on more possibilities of positive attitudes within such schools. The difficulties, at times, of interpreting qualitative emotive data of ‘sentiments’ and ‘anxieties’ are part of the humanistic qualities that make research an interest to investigate. There are, of course, other schools that are not monocultural in essence, but highlight the cultural diversity that exists in their environment. A comparative study of the responses of students in such a diverse context with a monocultural milieu could enrich the understanding of the students’ attitudes from two different cultural school perspectives. There is also the possibility of follow-up studies to find out how far these positive attitudes of this research were sustained and translated into positive interactions with the ‘cultural other’.

This research dealt with data from a coeducational school and used curriculum English literary texts that complemented the topic of this thesis. The texts are highly recommended as they were congruent with multicultural themes that characterized elements of learning of what was just and right in human behaviour. This approach has direct application to the recent Australian Curriculum developments which promote the study of literary texts as a means of learning about other cultures and developing intercultural understanding.

#### **7.4 Tracing the Essence of Change**

To end this research into the journeys of imagination undertaken by a class of students in English, it seems appropriate to focus on what it meant personally for the students. In the section that follows three participants are taken as illustrative examples of the



developmental changes achieved over the last four years of their secondary education. These changes are demonstrated in the students' written comments collected over those years during their journey toward understanding people who practice different cultures other than the majority one in Australia.

As an example of the changes that occurred among the students, one dramatic result in Year Nine was from student C15. Some of the Personally Negative comments that were written about the Indigenous Aboriginals in Australia in this student's pre-text statements are that "they smell . . . I don't like them . . . skanky backstabbing hoes". Then there was a complete contrast to the empathic words used in her post-text study of the film which revealed that the "Aboriginals were hard done by . . . the white men tried to force their own culture on the Aboriginal people . . . I feel sorry for the Aboriginals about what happened to them". Her progress toward this positivity of attitude continued to escalate in Year Ten where she states that "Jonathon met his daughter's boyfriend and he started to remember his own boyhood and he saw himself in the boyfriend." She was one only among two students who showed Some Knowledge about Italian immigrants in Australia in that she "knew they arrived here, they spoke very little English and in some cases not at all. The Australian people didn't except [sic] these immigrants and hardly made any effort to." Again she showed a dramatic difference compared to the majority of the other students. After the in-depth analysis of the short story, student C15 revealed Some Sense of the Irony with Some Understanding of the Italian culture. In this, she was among the majority who expressed a more positive attitude and an appreciation of a different culture. By Year Twelve her choice of texts represents the awareness she portrays of the

“difference between cultures and more understanding” that “intolerance is unjust and makes the reader want to NOT emulate the prejudice.”

In contrast to the startling results of some of the students who achieved similar changes as the above student C15, a steady middle representation by C29 encompassed the similar views of a few others in the class. In Year Nine he began with Unsure/Ambiguous comments in expressing his pre-text statements about Australian Aboriginals as “having dark hair; weaker resistance towards alcohol; . . . they were the original Australians; . . . I haven’t met any”. After the study of the film, there was only a slight shift toward the Generally Positive line of continuum in that he still “Didn’t know any aboriginals – knew about stolen generation – was disgusted by it.” His feelings were “pretty much the same as before – but more pity.” His position remained within the mid line which revealed Limited Knowledge about the Italian immigrants in Australia in that all he knew “about Italian Immigrants is that they are Italian, and immigrants . . . they formed tight-knit communities all around Australia”. About half of the total students were within this category. In a continuous reflection, his post-text comments showed Some Sense of the Irony, central to the plot, and an Appreciation of the family issue in that “Jonathon . . . felt guilty about his father . . . if I was him I’d go and make peace with my parents”, which were the sentiments of the majority of the class.

In his understanding of the Italian culture, student C29 was the only one whose comments showed only a Little Understanding. This placed him in an individualistic situation which was reflective of his unique choice of texts in Year Twelve. Although the texts

themselves were of a high literary calibre, his positivity of attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’ remained within the Generally Positive. He states that “many of my friends range in religion and culture”, however, continues to comment about literature as being “most certainly an introspective experience . . . tolerance is not an aspect of my personality that has been increased.” These statements and others he made have a tendency to be in the middle of the range for the last senior year level.

In the last category, student C21 depicted primarily positive attitudes throughout the three year levels. Her pre-text comments on Australian Aboriginals, in Year Nine, were written with Some Personal Understanding of their relationship with white people in that “indigenous people are seen as the lower race . . . beneath white people”. She then reflects Empathy With their cause after the post-text study and states that “now I understand that it wasn’t that long ago, and that people are still suffering for it.” She was among the majority of the class in her knowledge about Italian immigrants. Here she had Limited Knowledge in her pre-text statements where she comments that “I do not know anything about Italian immigrants in Australia . . . I know we are a very multicultural nation and many other cultures have had a real influence on our food and ways of life.” However, in her post-study statements, she was only one of two students who understood the protagonist’s personal cultural dilemma. Here she reasons that the protagonist “changed his identity to become someone else. Different cultures are not greatly accepted into society.” She was also only one of two students who had an Appreciation of the irony in the short story, which she expressed in her post-text comments as, “Jonathon grew up not wanting to be Italian and his daughter Annabelle’s first boyfriend

turned out to be an Italian”. The analysis of her Year Twelve statements showed that she remained Generally Positive and did not vacillate in her attitudes toward the ‘cultural other’. Her remarks support this in stating that the “texts have influenced me in different ways . . . many of the texts had the prominent idea of racism which has changed my way of thinking . . . . and made me more understanding” about “cultural difference”.

The three representative students justify the positive results that were attained by all the students in this research. It revealed the ‘value’ of the literary text in a formal educational English classroom where stimulating cognitive processes took place in the student’s imagination, which was in lieu of the actual contact with the ‘cultural other’ and absent in their social environment. It remains now only to conjecture how much each student activated these positive attitudes in their every day life. This investigation did not include any research past Year Twelve, yet there is confidence that the seed has been planted with the hopes of producing foreseeable fruition of positive attitudes, if not in all, then in the majority of the participant students in this research. It seems that in the words of the poet, Emily Dickinson, the words of poets and novelists can depict meanings which stir the students’ imagination about “ordinary” things and elicit deeply felt responses, which would not otherwise have been experienced.

*This was a Poet – It is That  
Distils amazing sense  
From ordinary Meanings –  
An Attar so immense*

*From the familiar species  
That perished by the Door –  
We wonder it was not Ourselves  
Attested it – before –*

in Peter Abbs (1989).

## APPENDIX

### Letter of Permission for Students' Participation in Research

Dear Parent/Guardian

For the last two years I have done post-graduate research at the University of Adelaide for a Doctorate in Education. The specific research is in English literature, which I teach at the College. This particular research endeavours to establish an understanding of the English Literature in the syllabus in relationship to the way this literature impacts on students. What do our students get out of reading and analysing novels, plays, poetry and short stories? Does it have any influence on their lives in practicality terms? What may be placed within the syllabus to facilitate more practical and meaningful learning for students? These are just some of the questions which this research attempts to address.

I seek your permission to allow your son/daughter to partake in this research for a tracking period of this year, till the end of Year 9, and next year till the end of Year 10, Year Eleven and Year Twelve. The methodology for the research will be in essay statement form (not very different to the students' responses normally conducted in class). There will be, of course, absolute anonymity. The students' responses will be integrated as naturally as possible within the class studied texts.

I have spoken to the Principal about this study and is fully supportive and happy for the students at the College to participate.

I will appreciate your co-operation and your signature for this initial research to be carried out.

With kind regards,

Yours faithfully

**Mary Vlahakis**

.....

**I agree for (student's name).....to participate in the study being conducted by Ms Mary Vlahakis.**

.....  
**Parent/Guardian Signature**

.....  
**Date**

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