Encounters with Racism; The Need for Courageous Conversations in Australian Initial Teacher Education Programs to Address Racial Inequality for Aboriginal Peoples

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Abstract

The strategy of courageous conversations is offered as a means of addressing racial inequity experienced by Australian Aboriginal peoples evident in society's institutions like education. Despite teacher preparation programs efforts to prepare pre-service teachers for diversity in the classroom, the issue of racism remains problematic. The denial of racism existing in contemporary times is commonplace. Alternatively, rather than being understood as a collective and active colonial and cultural inheritance, racism has been thoroughly reconstructed as an individual moral aberration. Dialogues about racism are often difficult and may create discomfort, raise feelings of indifference, guilt, resistance, shame, and mistrust that lead to avoidance or denial allowing 'white' people to remain ignorant that racial issues are endemic. Such denial and avoidance is a privilege not afforded to Aboriginal peoples who have been racially constructed and measured since the onset of dispossessing colonisation in the late 18th century. To not speak of racism and how it intersects with structural inequity for Australian Aboriginal students, serves only to perpetuate dominant racialised narratives that produce and reproduce 'white' privilege. This paper draws on and repurposes quantitative data gathered through a two-year critical ethnographic investigation that sought to identify and document what does successful teaching of Aboriginal high school students look like and what challenges do successful teachers encounter? The research quickly revealed the many guises of racism being encountered by teachers and students, personally and professionally, overtly and covertly, within and beyond the school gates. In this paper, narratives of encounters with racism shared by participants are provided to demonstrate the need for intentional and explicit courageous conversations in our schools that start in the Initial Teacher Education classroom.

Keywords: aboriginal education, courageous conversations, ethnography, initial teacher education, pre-service teachers, racial inequity, racism, white privilege

1. Introduction

Education is commonly cited as one of the most critical factors in influencing a variety of quality of life standards across most Western countries, and is widely recognised as essential for righting the inequities experienced by people from traditionally disadvantaged and underserved backgrounds (Beresford, 2012; Bodkins-Andrews & Carlson, 2013; Foley, 2013). Yet, rather than being a system for social change that benefits all, education continues to perpetuate many lifelong inequalities. It is indisputable that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (henceforth Aboriginal peoples) have experienced a long history of educational inequities when compared to our non-Aboriginal counterparts (Beresford, 2012; Foley, 2013). Education policies enacted by coloniser sought variously to civilise, Christianise, integrate, segregate and assimilate (Daniels-Mayes, 2016). Indeed, for generations the purpose and quality of education has differed markedly for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (Foley, 2013). This history of racist-inspired policies has left a tragic legacy of intergenerational poor educational outcomes and life opportunities for Aboriginal people that continue into the present day. In this paper, it is argued that there is a social imperative that pre-service teachers be explicitly and intentionally taught how to interrogate discourses of 'race', in order to understand its deleterious impact for Aboriginal peoples (McGowen & Kern, 2016; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012). The strategy of courageous conversations is offered as a method of addressing racial inequity experienced by Aboriginal peoples evident in Australian social institutions like education.

1.1 Literature Review

Many readers may never meet, teach or interact at a personal level with an Aboriginal Australian in their capacity as a teacher (Foley, 2013). Additionally, increasing intermarriage ensures increased devolution of ethnic characteristics skin tones become fairer and eye colour is varied, yet the student remains of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, and therefore, teachers may not realise that they have Indigenous students in their classroom. Due to their socialisation by family, and exposure to media and political rhetoric, teachers may possess predetermined understandings about Aboriginal culture and issues without understanding that their views are probably embedded with racist narratives that reinforce their white privilege. Nichols (2005, p. 2) insightfully states:

> Rather than being understood as a collective and active cultural inheritance, racism has been thoroughly reconstructed as an individual moral aberration. As a consequence, the claim that individuals or groups within the nation might be racist has become tantamount to slander. This discursive reconstruction of racism has forged a broad social consensus which is most frequently expressed in claims that our tolerant, multicultural nation has moved beyond whatever 'racial issues' it might have once had.

Such reconstruction serves only to perpetuate racism and racial inequity that has become so normalised in our nation's narrative that for many it is invisible or difficult to identify. A fundamental tenet of Critical Whiteness Studies is that unless "white' people 'learn to acknowledge, rather than deny, how whites are complicit in racism, and until white people develop an awareness that critically questions the frames of truth and conceptions of the "good" through which they understand their social world racism will persist" (Applebaum, 2016, p. 1). But when discussions about 'race', colonialism, and 'white' privilege, do occur, they are often difficult conversations, frequently creating discomfort, raise feelings of indifference, guilt, resistance, shame, and mistrust that lead to avoidance or denial (Cowlishaw, 2005; Tatum, 1992). To avoid or deny the existence of racism and it's ongoing impact for Aboriginal students means that many 'white' teachers lack the critical awareness of how white privilege manifests in education and among teachers. Buckskin (2013, p. 4) argues:

> In Australia, there is a lack of analysis on the impact of racism in Indigenous educational outcomes; and while there is a lack of evidence, White Australia can continue to argue that racism is not the issue that results in poor educational outcomes.

Initial Teacher Education programs have the difficult task of equipping pre-service teachers not only with the necessary technical skills needed to teach, but also to prepare future teachers to have the confidence to prepare students with the competencies they need to become active citizens and workers in the 21st century (Schleicher, 2011). However, Initial Teacher Education programs too often ill-prepare pre-service teachers to confidently and successfully engage with the multiple layers of social, cultural and historical realities within which students and school communities live every day (Price & Hughes, 2009; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Most Initial Teacher Education programs have evolved to embed social justice themes (e.g. gender, disability, socioeconomic status) into course curriculum. But content relating to Aboriginality, racism, white privilege and colonisation remain either conspicuously absent or, at best, nominally included. For some time, the Australian Education Union has advocated that all teachers employed in the public education system in Australia should complete a comprehensive sequence of Aboriginal Studies as a minimum requirement for their employment (AEU, 2002). But generally speaking, this is yet to be realised.

In 2011, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) released the National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014). The Standards recognise the key role the teacher plays in student success. Overall, they provide standards that articulate what teachers are expected to know and be able to do at varying stages of their professional development (AITSL, 2014, p. 1). There are seven Standards in three domains: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. Each of the Standards has a number of focus areas, Supporting Aboriginal students by attending to their distinct cultural needs is intended to be embedded in each of the Standards (Perso & Hayward, 2015). However, there are only two standards that specifically mention Aboriginal students or Aboriginal Studies:

Standard 1: Know students and how they learn

Focus Area 1.4: Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

On successful completion of their initial teacher education, Graduate teachers are required to "Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds".

Standard 2: Know the content and how to teach it.

Focus Area 2.4: Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

On successful completion of their initial teacher education, Graduate teachers are required to "Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages" (AITSL, 2014).

In the report titled, Learning the lessons? Pre-Service Teacher Preparation for Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students, Moreton-Robinson et al., (2012) notes the absence of problematising 'race' and racism in pre-service teacher training. Moreton-Robinson et al., (2012, p. 1) states: "...the range of subjects on offer are designed to transfer knowledge and awareness of Indigenous history and culture absolving the role that race plays in structuring disadvantage and privilege". If the education system is to disrupt and redress racial inequity and provide opportunities for success for Aboriginal students, then Initial Teacher Education programs need to intentionally and explicitly embed in their pedagogy and curriculum, dialogues about racism and its ongoing impact on Aboriginal peoples.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

To ask about racism is for many to raise the question of whether or not pre-service students are bad 'white' people who intentionally enact racism on their culturally different students (Tatum, 1992). As such, discussions about 'race', colonialism, and 'white' privilege, when they do occur, are often difficult conversations and may create discomfort, raise feelings of indifference, guilt, resistance, shame, and mistrust leading to avoidance or denial (Tatum, 1992). Avoiding the subject of race is a privileged position not afforded to Aboriginal peoples, whose racialised bodies and culture has been analysed since first contact in the late 18th century (Cowlishaw, 2005). Discourses of racism and White privilege create and reinforce belief systems and societies that benefits individuals and those affiliated with the dominant culture (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; McGowen & Kern, 2016) and there is enormous advantage in staying ignorant of these discourses (McIntosh, 2011). As Gordon (1990) insightfully states, it is difficult for a group of people to critique (and work to change) the world, when the world works for that group of people. But 'white' peoples denial of racism, or inability to recognise racism, does not negate the reality that for Aboriginal peoples encounters with racism in society and its institutions like education are commonplace.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2020) defines 'encounter' as: 'a meeting (of adversaries or opposing forces) in conflict' and goes on to say, 'The fact of 'meeting with (a person or thing), esp. undesignedly or casually.' This paper shares narratives of encounters with racism commonly experienced within our schools and beyond the school gate gathered in critical ethnographic research, the details of which are discussed below in the methods section. The purpose of this paper is to establish the need for courageous conversations in pre-service teacher classrooms about the many guises of racism and how it intersects with inequity for Aboriginal peoples. Singleton and Linton (2006) describe courageous conversations as:

> dialogues in which participants commit to engage each other with honesty, open-mindedness, and vulnerability; to listen deeply to better understand each other's perspective; and to sustain the conversation when it gets uncomfortable or diverted.

Courageous conversations go beyond mere rhetoric. Instead, they are embedded in a commitment "to begin addressing this racial gap—intentionally, explicitly, and comprehensively" (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 2). Courageous conversations are a strategy designed to stop often well-intentioned people being unwittingly or deliberately complicit in enacting racism. as Castagno (2014) poignantly reminds us, being nice can '... encourage us to gloss over ugly, tense, or otherwise hurtful things – and to do so carefully and precisely' (p. 17). Initial Teacher Education programs must offer pre-service teachers a safe learning environment in which they can freely explore and reflect on their emotions and feelings regarding white privilege long before they enter the school and classroom (Solomon, et al., 2005).

According to Singleton and Linton, (2006), four ground rules are followed when undertaking courageous conversations: 1) stay engaged: 1. Stay engaged: 'remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue' (p.59); 2) Experience discomfort: This ground rule acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable when discussing 'race', and therefore participants need to make a commitment to bring issues into the open so that healing and change begin; 3) Speak your truth: This means being open about thoughts, assumptions, stereotypes and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear or glossing over key issues; and 4) Expect and accept non-closure: This rule asks participants to 'hang out in uncertainty' and not rush to quick solutions, especially in relation to racial and cultural understanding, which requires ongoing dialogue. The ground rules, or four agreements, aim to open up a dialogue about racial inequity embedded in honesty without excessive fear of being labeled racist, biased or bigoted, to avoid blaming or being blamed, and to avoid discounting or invalidating the experiences and feelings of others (Singleton, 2016). Committing to, and Engaging in, courageous conversations is offered in this paper as a method for creating a disturbing or destabilising presence without being uncivilised or rude (Ladson-Billings 1999) while at the same time, not be so nice (Castagno, 2014) in a culturally safe environment. Arguably, many pre-service teachers come to the profession with a social justice agenda, but who are unwittingly trapped by their own racist backgrounds. Therefore, it is imperative that

pre-service teachers be intentionally and explicitly taught how to critically question and analyse their own whiteness in order to understand its impact in the classroom and beyond, becoming an opposing force when they encounter racism.

2. Method

2.1 Critical Ethnography and 'Proper Ways' Research

This paper draws on and repurposes quantitative data that sought to identify and document what does successful teaching of Aboriginal high school students look like and what challenges do successful teachers encounter? The original study borrowed and bent three theoretical frameworks: critical ethnography which begins with an ethical responsibility that enables researchers to not only investigate and understand society, but also to critique and potentially transform processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain as a result of the research (Castagno, 2011; Thomas, 1993). culturally responsive education; and, Critical Race Theory. The principles of Indigenous storying methods, known as yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010), and Storywork (Archibald, 2008), enabled the research to be undertaken 'proper ways' (borrowed from Aunty Nangala, personal communication, 23 June, 2013). 'Proper Ways' research is an Aboriginal English term that means the research was mindful of working in ways that were socially, ethically and culturally responsible, locating the research within the cultural ways of knowing, being and doing of participants and researcher. It is a research approach that privileges the valuable insider knowledge of research participants and Indigenous methodologies (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Moreton-Robinson, 2011).

This qualitative inquiry led to a prior publication titled: A courageous conversation with racism: Revealing the racialised Master Storys of Aboriginal deficit, disadvantage and failure for pre-service teachers (Daniels-Mayes, 2019). This prior publication borrowed the narrative therapy technique of externalising conversations that locate problems not solely within individuals, but as products of social construction created over time (Morgan, 2002). More specifically, I used the externalising conversation practice of one person (teacher educator) interviewing another who is role-playing the identified problem (Racism, the Master Storyteller) (Wingard, 2010). The paper sought to bring together, in one location, a number of socio-cultural and socio-historical events and narratives regarding Aboriginal peoples and their cultures. It was not intended to be definitive, but rather a starting point for pre-service teachers to engage in courageous conversations about racial inequity experienced by Aboriginal students. However, this prior publication did not utilise the shared encounters with racism disclosed by research participants that is the focus of this present paper.

2.2 Research Location, Participant Sample and Ethics

This current paper utilised the method of multi-sited school ethnography (Castagno, 2006; Vaught, 2006) that examine culturally responsive pedagogies in two mainstream secondary schools in metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia. The research worked extensively with six community nominated teachers (Foster, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McDonald, 2003), three at each school, over two years of field work. The research participants taught across all year levels (and in South Australia that was from years 8-12), and subject disciplines, with teaching experience ranging from two years to over three decades. There were three male and three female teachers with one identifying as being Aboriginal. The research involved classroom observations and conversations with a purpose (Burgess, 1988). Each school had an Aboriginal student population of at least 10 per cent of the overall student population which is three times the national average (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). While higher than average, students still belonged to a minority culture within participating schools.

The investigation complied with the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies (AIATSIS, 2012) and secured human research ethics approval from both the University of South Australia and the relevant education department. To maintain privacy and anonymity, pseudonyms chosen by research participants were used rather than teachers' real names.

2.3 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data gathered through field notes, classroom observations, participant interviews and policy analysis, was analysed at multiple points along the research pathway. I looked for themes within individual school sites, across school sites, within and among various groups of people, and across time, in addition to looking for counterexamples and disconfirming evidence (Vaught, 2006). The themes were then bundled according to emerging patterns (Kovach, 2009). Like Kovach (2009) I was mindful that theme bundling is not an Indigenous method and that to undertake my research 'proper ways' discussed above, I needed to respect the voices and insider knowledge of the research participants. This adherence to Indigenous research protocols (AIATSIS, 2012) enabled participants to share stories of personal and professional, overt and covert racism, within and beyond the school gate that they encounter in their every day. Thematic bundling provides overwhelming evidence for needing to engage in courageous conversations in Initial Teacher Education programs.

3. Findings

The research supported scholarship that found that Aboriginal students encounter racism in a variety of ways and from a

range of sources including harmful assumptions, paternalism, prejudice, low expectations, stereotypes, physical and emotional violence, and through symbolic violence evident in biased curriculum materials (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). More often than not, such enactments of racism are so embedded that they have become normalised, as exemplified in the words of Mrs. Tyler, a relatively new non-Indigenous Aboriginal Education Worker at one participating school:

> My father is of European descent and he says that 'Aborigines [*sic*] should know by now that they've been conquered; it would have been better if we'd shot them all when we had the chance'. But that's how he is and we don't take him seriously [laughs] (Mrs. Tylor).

This encounter with racism occurred as we were walking along a school corridor, having just finished interviewing Mrs. Tylor for the research investigation. The story was shared 'in a way that implied it was of no real significance' (Field Notes: 2015).

The embeddedness of racism in Australian society was further revealed in a story shared by Humanities teacher Mr. James who disclosed that his "father's side has a Ngarrindjeri /Kaurna heritage. So, I'm Ngarrindjeri" (Mr. James). He talked openly and passionately of the times his Aboriginal identity has been challenged or dismissed:

> Based on my olive appearance and darkish features, occasionally people thought I was south-western European (Greek, Italian, Spanish, etc.). Granted I have a Spanish heritage so the assumption was somewhat true but as far as my identity goes, or rather how I identify myself with my history and other aspects of my cultural identity, it's a little off. In some cases, when I verbally identified myself as being Ngarrindjeri (usually done when asked), people would boldly disregard it and say things like 'Oh you definitely look Spanish' or 'But you have a Spanish background, right?' dismissing my Indigenous identity claim as if it were something to be ashamed of or as if I were perhaps a little delusional (Mr. James).

These two stories are illustrative of the inherited racialised colonial legacy that Australians have inherited over generations that persist in contemporary society (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016;Daniels-Mayes, 2016). Year 12 English teacher Mrs. Knight summed it up this way, "Regardless of what people say racism is extremely embedded in many, many aspects of our society" (Mrs. Knight).

When discussing the issue of apparent racist tensions in one school with Elder and Aboriginal Education Worker Aunty Nangala, she angrily stated:

> They [teachers and school leaders] just don't get how racist they are. They don't see the damage they are doing to our kids when they talk about them (student) being 'hopeless like their brother' or, 'not worth our time'. They just lump them together as being Aboriginal equal's trouble and more work (Aunty Nangala).

This story of Aboriginal students being positioned in a frame of racialised deficit is further illustrated by teacher and Aboriginal Education Team Leader Mr. Banks who stated:

> That general deficit talk like 'I didn't ring the family because they're not gonna pick up the phone anyway' or 'I didn't bother with that kid because even if he came to class he wouldn't get it'. That sort of stuff is common place everywhere across the school (Mr. Banks).

Sarra, et al. (2011) assert that the challenge for school staff "is to move beyond what is often an entrenched mindset about Aboriginal identity" (p. 177). That is, Being Aboriginal does not equate to 'more work', 'trouble' and inevitable failure unless this is the uncritiqued dominant racialised narrative of educators, school or society that reproduce white privilege and maintain racial inequity.

Additionally, Research participants frequently spoke of encounters with racism in school policies and practises. By way of an example, Head of School Mrs. Harris tells of timetabling issues at her school three years earlier. Mrs. Harris explains that when Aboriginal students, attending from remote communities, are academically and socially ready they progress into the parallel mainstream school. This school is a focus school with the timetable being split between the music stream and the remaining subjects. Mrs. Harris noted that her students were being invariably streamed in to the non-specialty stream and, in addition, were being placed in the more generic classes. When she brought this to the notice of the school principal Mrs. Harris was simply told, "We thought they'd want to stay together". Castagno (2014, p. 1) asserts that:

> Most educators are nice people with the best of intentions regarding the schooling they provide to students every day. Despite their good intentions and the general niceness among educators, most schools in the United States contribute to inequity every day.

Likewise, I contend that there are many well-intentioned, 'nice' teachers within Australian schools. However, left

uncritiqued, such niceness as that illustrated by Mrs. Harris can become normalised with racialised narratives being rendered invisible. With over three decades of teaching practice Mrs. Harris was troubled and dismayed by the lack of awareness of the "true meaning that underpins such [nice] thinking" (Mrs. Harris) that fails to understand how they are undermining the educational success of Aboriginal young people (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Furthermore, racism was encountered in the participating schools by the apparent differential treatment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students when it came to the enactment of behaviour management policies. In many circumstances, teachers have discretionary power whether to enforce the disciplinary policies of the school. When students—be they Aboriginal or not—reach the maximum warnings and/or suspensions they are excluded from the school. Numerous stories of disciplinary practices were shared across the schools by research participants, of which three of the many are shared here to illustrate the finding that discipline was often unequally and unfairly administered.

First, in his two-year history with the school Mr. Banks disclosed that he has witnessed or been involved with numerous accounts of what he interpreted as "disciplinary bias" metered out by teachers (including lead teachers). He spoke passionately about a variety of incidents where Aboriginal students appeared to be targeted for punishment or receiving disciplinary action that was disproportionate to that metered out to non-Aboriginal counterparts. He summed it up this way:

> We've got so many teachers that just are on the war path and are looking to shoot these kids down; and I really feel like there's teachers who are happy to find any excuse to get rid of some of the [Aboriginal] kids (Mr. Banks).

To demonstrate this assertion, Mr. Banks told me of one student receiving a three-day suspension for stealing a teacher's USB. On investigation by Mr. Banks and members of his team, it was discovered that the student had found it on the floor behind the teachers' desk, picked it up and instead of placing it on the desk had placed it in his pocket, left class and lost it on the oval at lunchtime. Mr. Banks stated:

> He's not deliberately gone through your bag and stolen it; they've just jumped at it straight away because it's easier to say three days suspension, then we don't have to deal with it. Because perhaps he wasn't on track in class or something like that, it's easier to do that (Mr. Banks).

This apparent tendency to jump at the option of punishment is further illustrated in a story referred to as the "classic" by Mr. Banks. In this incident, two students kick a ball around in the senior courtyard (a potentially dangerous act). The Aboriginal student is given "suspension pending expulsion". One week earlier a non-Aboriginal student committed the same act and received five days exclusion, "So, what's the difference?" Mr. Banks asked me with a cynical tone in his voice.

Furthermore, Mrs. Knight spoke with great passion and dismay about a "young lad" of 18 with whom she had worked closely with for five years, becoming his confidante and ardent supporter, being instrumental in him staying on and completing Year 12. Despite having had an extremely tragic life that had resulted in him now living independently, he was still managing to come to school (be it sometimes late). Mrs. Knight noted in her interview the negative differential treatment he received by some teachers and with great passion and frustration in her voice, stated:

> This school was just giving him a hard time. He was just stopped in the school yard if he was late. It was just astounding. I would think 'geez, if I was in that position would I even bother?' (Mrs. Knight).

Speaking of this same student, Mr. Banks stated:

> And it was like, 'you expect him to be here on time?' He was one of those kids who would walk through the front gate and he'd have a bright pair of shorts on with his school top on and the Deputy would meet him at the gate and send him home because he had the wrong coloured shorts on (Mr. Banks).

This selection of stories of differential behavioural management of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, are reveal encounters with embedded racism, and how racialized mindsets become apparent in unfair and unequal practise.

In none of the stories shared by research participants, are the instigators of racism being necessarily intentionally bad or malicious. However, by failing to critically question their pedagogies, their intentions and actions, or question policy and curriculum, teachers are nonetheless contributing to the exclusion that Aboriginal students often experience at school. Thus, as Castagno (2011, p. 393) asserts: "... we all need to recognize the role we play in creating and sustaining oppressive systems".

Not all participating teachers undertook university courses that would have prepared them to not only be teachers, but culturally responsive pedagogues for Aboriginal students (Castagno, 2012). Recent graduates, Mr. James and Mr. Banks both undertook subjects or assignments that focused on Aboriginal studies, racism or history. both agreed that such studies helped put "things in perspective" (Mr. James) with regards to Aboriginal students. Likewise, both Mr. James

and Mr. Banks noted the value of undertaking such "in-depth" (Mr Banks) research tasks. But for both, such studies were not mandatory. By comparison, neither Mr. Scott nor Mrs. Sullivan recalled undertaking any Indigenous or Aboriginal specific courses or assignments while at university. Instead, both teachers described transformative moments (Ladson-Billings, 2009) resulting from teaching experiences. For example, Mr Scott noted that while working at Traeger Park School in Alice Springs he was exposed to the Accelerated Literacy Program (ALP) where:

> Many case studies were related to Aboriginal students in this and other schools. ALP was promoted as a good methodology for helping Aboriginal students to gain a better understanding of western academic discourse and make gains in their literacy skills. (Mr. Scott)

Alternatively, for Mrs Sullivan her knowledge of Aboriginal students and their culture was greatly enhanced during her two years as a tutor for Aboriginal students in a private boarding school, where Aboriginal students (predominantly from remote communities) made up 10% of the student population:

> I was a bit overwhelmed at first. I wasn't sure what to expect or how to act. You know, not looking her (student) in the eye, for example. I didn't want to offend. It didn't take long though to build relationships with them; just listening, getting to know them and their families and where they're from. I still go back there and visit the girls. (Mrs. Sullivan)

Furthermore, as a teacher with over three decades of experience, Mrs. Knight argues that pre-service, or new teachers to the school would benefit from reading books such as Bruce Elder's Blood on the wattle and, "things like that". Mrs. Knight went on to state that teachers:

> Need To understand that Aboriginal people were killed and slaughtered because they took sheep while their whole lands were being destroyed and the belief that they might be bred out. (Mrs. Knight)

By learning about the historical context of Aboriginal peoples, Mrs. Knight is arguing that her colleagues will be better positioned to work with Aboriginal students, rather than "judging them" (Mrs. Knight) from an uncritiqued standpoint of white privilege. Such knowledge acquisition is not about excusing Aboriginal students because of past events but rather a way to understand instead of "judging or punishing" (Mrs. Knight) Aboriginal students and perpetuating racism and resulting racial inequity. Writing of pre-service teacher training that prepares teachers to successfully educate Aboriginal students, Price and Hughes (2009, p. v) contend: "Australian students need teachers with the education and confidence to be effective and successful". This includes explicit and intentional dialogue about the many guises of racism and how to be a disruptive adversary to encounters of racism within classrooms, schools and beyond the school gate. It would seem obvious that such training should begin in Initial Education programs to better prepare educators for the work ahead.

4. Discussion

Gathered data from the original critical ethnographic research project provides significant evidence that participating teachers are achieving educational success with Aboriginal students through a culturally centred teaching approach referred to as caring-demander (Daniels-Mayes, 2016). But the original research also identified a disturbing number of stories regarding encounters with racism by teachers, Aboriginal Education Workers and students. Such encounters with racism, discussed above, serve only to reinforce white privilege and not righting the inequities experienced by Aboriginal peoples for generations (Beresford, 2012; Bodkins-Andrews & Carlson, 2013; Foley, 2013). The gathered data illustrates how the education system contributes to racial inequity instead of influencing social change that would potentially lead to increased educational outcomes, better quality of life standards and more opportunities for Aboriginal students and their communities. Participating teachers understood that racism has been reconstructed so as to become invisible, difficult to identify, 'an individual moral aberration' (Nichols, 2005, p. 2) that has rendered dialogues of racism silent. While research participants were mostly able to recognise racism and the resulting inequity, enacting change within their schools and beyond the school gates, was far more difficult a task for which their pre-service training had largely not prepared them to confidently undertake.

The terms 'racial' and 'inequity' are complex ideas developed through a process of social construction that rely on a myriad of narratives. Through the process of courageous conversations such complex concepts can be deconstructed to reveal their many components (Daniels-Mayes, 2020). The *Continuing Courageous Conversations Toolkit,* funded by the Iowa Department of Human Services, provides a comprehensive resource aimed at not just individual change but organisational change with regards to racial inequity (D'Aunno & Heinz, 2017). The components of microaggressions, racial conscious an autobiography, privilege, anti-Racist Bystander Intervention and implicit bias are critically analysed with exercises and resources provided (D'Aunno & Heinz, 2017). Ultimately, the Toolkit seeks to increase awareness of how racial dynamics can impact our practice and ways in which racism can be revealed and disrupted. Within the Australian context, concepts such as colonisation, terra nullius, social Darwinism, biological determinism, Stolen

Generations, reconciliation as well as Aboriginal identity and culture are all components of a deconstructed 'racial' 'inequity' framework (Daniels-Mayes, 2020).

If pre-service teachers were to engage in the process of courageous conversations proposed by D'Aunno and Heinz (2017) and/or ; Singleton and Linton (2006), about the encounters provided above, then perhaps white privilege, racism and racial inequity, would become apparent. For example, in the encounter with Mrs. Tyler, who did not seem to be aware of the harmful impact of her father's words on the Aboriginal researcher she is speaking with; or that they are presentative of ongoing dominant discourses of Aboriginal deficit; or, the white privilege that she has inherited from her father. Additionally, courageous conversations about Mr. James encounter with racism that challenged is Aboriginal identity would perhaps reveal how common and how casually this act of racism occurs for many Aboriginal people who fail to fit the stereotype of what an Aboriginal person should look like. Mixed blood," and "half-caste" [as "detribalized" Aboriginal people have been pejoratively called for almost 250 years since first contact, are ironically perceived as having a contaminated identity, unworthy of serious consideration as "real Aborigines {sic}." (Aspinall, 2013). In engaging in courageous conversations pre-service teachers would have the opportunity to learn of the hurt and harm of identity politics.

Undoubtedly, there needs too to be courageous conversations about deficit constructs of Aboriginal students, families and communities. Aunty Nangala and Mr. Banks spoke of the 'damage being done to our kids' through 'general deficit' talk'. Here we have an Aboriginal Elder and educator as well as a non-Aboriginal educator speaking of the same low expectation attitudes embedded in their school and the harm that such thinking does to our kids, with "harm" being a 'nice' term that allows us to 'gloss over ugly, tense, or otherwise hurtful things' (Castagno, 2014, p. 17). In a different way, Mrs. Harris talks of the niceness of 'wanting to keep students together' based on students being Aboriginal with no thought process of individuality, of student aspirations and how such niceness may instead hinder the success of Aboriginal students.

Finally, with regards to the differential use of discipline between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, I offer a counterstory from the research. Year 10 science teacher and school deputy, Mr. Scott, told me: "I had a boy today and he got really angry and wanted to punch someone because this boy had said (to him) 'Ah you're 13' when he's 14" (Mr. Scott). While on the surface this incident could just simply be dismissed as "that teasing stuff" (Mr. Scott), another meaning of this anger is understood instead. For these young men, who come from remote communities that continue to practise Men's Business, being teased that you are younger than is true is highly offensive and hurtful. Mr. Scott continues:

> You can set very rigid rules of how 'if a kid does this then you do this' sort of terms of behaviour management all that sort of stuff, but I think having a more individualised sort of approach does help and that does involve knowing about where the idea is coming from. So you can sort of make those adjustments in your approach (Mr. Scott).

In this story, the normalised institutional policies of behaviour management are not strictly enforced. Instead, Mr. Scott has spent time with his students, their families and communities, acquiring knowledge of the distinct cultural practices of the students that result in a more informed, culturally responsive, course of action. Mr. Scott does not condone the students' behaviour, but neither are the institution's policies, rules and procedures blithely enforced. This counterstory begs the question, 'What if the young lad with the bright shorts, and at times late for school, had been managed in a culturally responsive manner?' Likewise, what of the story of the missing USB; would this have been handled differently if unconscious racial biases weren't being played out by the teacher involved? These are questions that courageous conversations can begin to unpack.

4.1 Limitations, Strength and Future Directions

As with all research, the findings of the present study should be interpreted in light of a number of limitations. First, the small sample size in this study, which is common to qualitative research methods in general, limits the generalizability of the findings, and therefore, the results need to be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, through the use of a lengthy critical ethnographic process that utilised multiple methods, and analysed data at multiple points along the research pathway, looking for counterexamples and disconfirming evidence (Vaught, 2006), the research aimed to achieve a series of narratives that addressed the research question and findings were consistent across two school sites and from all participants. A further limitation is that the original research was not designed to argue for the need for courageous conversations about racism. Rather, this need for intentional and explicit dialogues was a finding of the original research that has led to the gathered data being repurposed in both a previous publication (Daniels-Mayes, 2019) and expanded in this current paper. The need for courageous conversations about racism, racial inequity and white privilege has been established but future research is needed to measure the impact and usefulness of this method in the Australian context. Despite these limitations, this research and subsequent papers, have extended the discussion about the need for

dialogue about racism experienced by Aboriginal students in Initial Teacher Education programs that is not an elective subject or assignment, but rather a mandatory component of pre-service teacher curriculum.

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