The Australian Educational Researcher (2023) 50:991–1005
https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00537-0

'But we're not a multicultural school!': locating intercultural relations and reimagining intercultural education as an act of 'coming-to-terms-with our routes'

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Received: 4 November 2021 / Accepted: 26 April 2022 / Published online: 25 May 2022
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Abstract
Learning to live in a superdiverse world might be heralded as one of the great social challenges of our time. In the last decade, intercultural education has been posed as one way to foster intercultural capabilities in young people that can contribute towards learning to live well with cultural difference. As the diaspora in Australia—and elsewhere—expands, developing intercultural understanding is seen as a priority. Despite the directives of official policy and curriculum, enacting intercultural education in meaningful ways is complex and fraught. This paper reports on an Australian ethnography at a predominantly 'white' school that examined the way productions of cultural difference across school spaces complicate teachers' intercultural work. This paper considers how intercultural understanding might move beyond celebrations of multiculturalism, arguing that 'coming-to-terms with our routes' necessarily prefigures intercultural understanding and provides opportunity for an intercultural education beyond a celebration of multiculturalism.

Keywords Intercultural education · Australian curriculum · Productions of space · Difficult histories

Introduction: (never quite post) colonial Australia, entangled histories and the imperative of intercultural education

Australia is a migrant nation. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 Census showed that Victorians represent approximately 200 countries, speak some 260 languages and follow 135 faiths, while almost one-third of Victorian public-school students are from non-English speaking backgrounds (ABS, 2016). Prior to colonisation, more than 250 Indigenous languages are known to have existed in Australia,

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and approximately 800 dialects (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS], n.d.). Cultural diversity—as with many migration nations—is part of the fabric of Australian society and is often celebrated as a success of multiculturalism. However, since colonisation, learning to live with difference has presented ongoing challenges to the colonial systems and structures of Australian society and to the fantasy of a white Australia imaginary (Elder et al., 2004; Hage, 1998, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Nicolacopoulos & Vassilacopoulos, 2004).

Post-colonial Australia is somewhat unique in that despite the British claim to Australia (that was never ceded) and the imposition of British rule, Australia has always been a land of diversities. The First Nations tribes of Australia are diverse in culture and language, not only between groups, but within groups as well (AIATSIS, n.d.). Over time, including before British arrival, people came to Australia from Africa, Europe, Asia and the Pacific under diverse circumstances. Despite being 'founded' by the British, Australia has never been a 'white' country and despite Australia's existing and increasing diversity, the possessive of 'whiteness' clings tenaciously onto the ontological construction of what it means to be Australian, even today (Haggis, 2004; Schech & Haggis, 2004).

According to Grant (2016, 2019) modern Australia is founded on racism. Hage (1998, 2014) argues that everyday racisms have become normalised and remain deeply ingrained in modern Australia. This social and historical context has profound implications for teachers' work and for education systems as mechanisms for building prosperous and equitable nations. This paper argues that to cultivate a future that moves beyond celebrations of diversity, schooling has a role to play in helping young people understand the troubled histories that continue to shape intercultural relations today.

Conceptual underpinning: a brief word on cultural identity

Central to the conceptual underpinning of this study is the question of culture and identity. According to Hall, identity is an ongoing process of symbolic representation that draws on "the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being" (Hall, 1996, p. 4). For Hall, these practices operate within the politics and power structures of particular sites, whereby discourses and practices shape the ways different people or groups are positioned and can position themselves. Hall (1996) calls this the "politics of location" (p. 1) whereby identities and the relational positioning of difference is a product of specific power structures. In colonised nations such as Australia—where the dominant image of Australian identity is tied to notions of a white patriarchy (Grant, 2016; Hage, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Nicolacopoulos & Vassilacopoulos, 2004; Tavan, 2005)—both whiteness and difference are neutralised and multiculturalism is celebrated as a kind of "harmonious pluralism" (Mohanty, 2003) or "happy point" of diversity (Ahmed, 2012), while silently reproducing privilege for some and inequity for others. This conceptualisation of culture informs the way I conceptualise the intercultural not as

a project of learning *about* cultural differences, but one of understanding the complex and mobile spaces *between* these differences.

This paper will first provide a critical review of the Intercultural Capability as positioned in the Australian and Victorian curriculums, before drawing on data from a single-site ethnography to examine the way existing situated social relations shape opportunities to develop intercultural understanding at the school. I argue how enabling a deeper examination of self-other relations may promote an ongoing reflexive practice in teachers and young people (see also Davies, 2022).

The Australian curriculum and the intercultural understanding general capability: a critical review

In the past 20 years, the focus on intercultural understanding as an important educational priority in Australia and internationally has seen—at least in theory—a shift in focus from learning *about* diverse cultural groups to improving relations *between* diverse cultural groups (ACARA, 2020; Deardorff, 2006; Dervin & Gross, 2016; Dietz, 2018; Guilherme & Dietz, 2015; UNESCO, 2006; VCAA, 2017). Various national and international policy levers—including the successive declarations on education goals for young Australians (Education Council, 2019), the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015), and the inclusion of global competence in the PISA testing regime (OECD, 2017)—has seen an Intercultural Understanding capability included in the current Australian curriculum (ACARA, 2020). The Australian curriculum and other official texts describe skills and knowledge related to young people's capacity to build positive relations towards culturally diverse people, positioning intercultural understanding as an aspirational goal towards social cohesion and harmony (ACARA, 2020; VCAA, 2017).

At the national level, the Intercultural Understanding capability is included as one of seven general capabilities[1] that are expected to be embedded into teachers' work across discipline areas at all levels. There is no national requirement to assess or report on student learning or growth in relation to these capabilities and it is up to the States and Territories to translate these capabilities into State and school-based curricula in ways relevant to their own jurisdictions. In Victoria—where this study took place—four of the capabilities detailed in the Australian Curriculum[2] have been translated into the State curriculum. These are a formally assessed component of the official Victorian curriculum, meaning teachers are expected to teach, assess

[1] The seven general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum include Literacy, Numeracy, ICT, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding.

[2] Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical, Intercultural and Personal and Social capabilities exist in the Victorian Curriculum as distinct bodies of knowledge and skills that are expected to be embedded through teachers' curriculum work across the curriculum. Knowledge and skills related to discipline specific Literacy, Numeracy and ICT are expected to be taught within the discipline as opposed to a discreet set of skills and knowledge woven across the curriculum, and are detailed within domain-related descriptors and outcomes (VCAA, n.d.).

and report on the development of Intercultural Understanding (and the other capabilities) in the young people they teach.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) states the Intercultural Capability "assists young people to become responsible local and global citizens equipped for living and working together in an interconnected world" (VCAA, n.d., Intercultural Capability). In addition, the VCAA asserts that "intercultural capability enables students to learn and value their own cultures, languages and beliefs and those of others' with the aim to cultivate mutual respect" (VCAA, n.d., Intercultural Capability). The aspirations of the Intercultural Capability echo the vision of the Mparntwe Declaration (Council of Australian Governments Education Council (Education Council), 2019), whereby young Australians are aspired to become

> active and informed members of the community who appreciate and respect Australia's rich social, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity…possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians; [and] are informed and responsible global and local members of the community who value and celebrate cultural and linguistic differences.

It is difficult to argue against the goal and aspiration for the development of intercultural understanding as it is framed in official texts. Yet, the inclusion of intercultural understanding in schools remains problematic (Gilbert, 2019; Walton et al., 2013, 2018). The problem is not so much a matter of curriculum and educational goals. Rather, it is a complex tension across intersections of education system design, professional practice and situated social practices (see also Davies, 2022).

While the VCAA provides links to resources and mapping tools to support teachers in embedding intercultural capability in their everyday work, these are developed from a standpoint of a neutral school environment and neutral orientation of people and places. And it is the intersection of this assumed neutrality and the cultural and social complexity of schools, students and teachers that make this work so difficult. This assumed neutrality might otherwise be conceptualised as the dominant or normative construction of Australian identity as 'white' and Australia's education system as a continuing mechanism of colonisation (see Frankenberg, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2009). This reference point is the foundation for all matters related to curriculum, schooling and nation building. This leads to the problem where the ontology of Australian education and the imaginary of Australian identity is in tension with the realities of a multicultural and (never quite post) colonial Australia (Haggis, 2004) seeking to 'cultivate mutual respect' for ambiguous groups of (non-white) cultural others in systems that privilege 'white' ways of being and knowing.

As a result, at least in part, of this tension, intercultural education has been largely translated in school settings in ad hoc ways that rely on programs that celebrate multiculturalism or simply raise awareness of cultural diversity (Gilbert, 2019; Gorski, 2008; Maylor, 2010; McCandless et al., 2020; Walton et al., 2013, 2018). What is missing at all levels of school and educational governance—and in the

public domain more broadly—is the 'emotional room' to reckon with the ongoing effects of colonisation in Australia (Elder et al., 2004). Such 'emotional room' may provide an opportunity to view intercultural education as "not the so-called return to roots, but a coming-to-terms-with our routes" (Gilroy, 1994, p. 4) to mitigate against essentialising culture and diversity and better understanding our entwined histories, cultures and identities with the view to 'cultivate mutual respect' in the intercultural relations of tomorrow.

I will now provide an overview of the study before moving to an examination of data to show how a first step towards developing intercultural understanding must be an examination of the spaces in-between diverse cultural groups and the conditions that have historically produced particular intercultural relations through complex networks of power and privilege.

The study: people, place and process

The study reported on in this paper is an ethnography based at one school situated in the outer-east of Melbourne, Australia. In this paper, the school will be referred to as Hillside High School (pseudonym). The Principal of the school described the geographical context of the school as a 'rural enclave', situated not far in distance from the cosmopolitan metropolis, Melbourne, but as a result of geographic contours (steep hills and valleys), this community remains largely unaffected by urban sprawl, changing demographic and associated social and cultural changes. Many families in the Hillside region have been settled in the area over many generations, and numerous teachers at the school commented to me that many students have never left and do not aspire to leave the region.

Hillside High School is described by Fen, one of the teacher participants at the school, as a comprehensive high school. This means that the school aims to provide a comprehensive educational experience, rather than focus narrowly on academic achievement, rankings and success metrics. All teachers at the school are white, approximately 30% have been teaching at the school for more than 20 years, and approximately 20% of teachers are past students of the school. The school has approximately 800 students and almost 70 staff, with 4% of students from a language background other than English and no identified Indigenous students (ACARA, 2020).

I came to conduct my research at this site through a colleague I had worked with previously on editing a series of resources she had developed for a professional association to support the teaching of the Ethical Capability. I approached her school and in excess of 20 other schools with diverse social, cultural and economic demographics with the intent of conducting a multi-site ethnography. However, my study was received with much resistance due to concerns about how schools and teachers may be represented, with particular concerns around issues of racism. This is perhaps indicative of the broader structural and ontological problems that this paper is pointing towards and worthy of its own investigation. As such, Hillside High School remained the sole research site. This, of course, presents itself as a key limitation to

this study and it will be important in the future to extend this kind of work to capture the experiences of teachers, and of young people, in a range of school settings.

Six teachers volunteered to participate in the study—one of whom was the colleague I had briefly worked with. Interested teachers registered their details with me after I presented at a whole of staff meeting. I provided the six teachers with explanatory statements and consent forms detailing the intent of the study and the terms of their participation. All six teachers agreed to take part of their own accord. The participants comprised three leading teachers, one learning specialist, one accomplished teacher and one graduate. At this school, a leading teacher is someone who holds a year level or subject area coordination role, or who takes responsibility for the development of a whole school approach to curriculum or practice—including the provision of professional learning, mentoring opportunities, and driving a coherent vision for curriculum and practice across the school. One participant was the leading teacher for professional practice, two others were coordinators in the senior years. An accomplished teacher is someone who has been working in the profession for more than 10 years but does not necessarily hold an additional position of responsibility. The graduate teacher was in her 2nd year of practice. Teacher participants came from a range of subject areas across the Humanities and year levels from 7 to 11.

When I presented to the whole staff, I explained that I would be observing and reporting on practices of the school more broadly, including interactions in staff and faculty meetings, school yard occurrences, and incidental conversations, including with young people in the classrooms I formally observed. As the focus of the project was on teachers' work and teacher practices, consent from young people directly was not sought. Rather the participant teachers and Principal understood that it would be difficult to understand teachers' classroom practices without understanding the relational spaces they occupy, including with students in classrooms. The Principal provided consent to these activities and agreed that all data, including my field notes and observations, would be shared, reviewed, and deidentified before publication.

I spent 3 days every week for 6 months getting to know and working with participant teachers across all aspects of their work. I observed their classes, spent time with them on yard duty, attended their meetings and ate my lunch and shared cups of coffee in their staffrooms. Over the course of 6 months, the teachers participated in two individual semi-structured interviews which bookended my time in the school, and three focus groups with their participant colleagues. Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed with experiences and stories of participants used verbatim in conversation with my field notes, reflections and observations. All names of participants and places have been deidentified and pseudonyms are used throughout. The interview and focus group data informed incidental conversations and future data generation activities.

Data analysis

As an ethnography, this study brought together my observations into conversation with interview and focus group data, as well as with broader observations from

beyond the particular classroom spaces I was invited to participate in. My observations and interactions with participants formed part of the preliminary analysis of our shared experiences in various school spaces. I also wrote reflections that brought these insights to question the way official curriculum texts were interpreted and translated through local school curriculum directives and how dominant social practices shape curriculum decision making at the school. Bringing the data together in this way enabled me to identify rhythms (Christie, 2013; Lefebvre, 2004) of social interaction that shape the school and teachers' work.

For Lefebvre (2004), the exploration of the rhythms of everyday life through rhythmanalysis encourages a rethinking of the way complex interactions across and between abstract and lived spaces of everyday life are understood. Rhythm is produced through social action in relation to, across and through time. The cyclical rhythms of school bells, timetables and assessment and reporting regimes; the repetitive rhythms producing students as 'lacking aspiration'; the dominant rhythms that assert subject areas such as English and Physical Education as privileged and powerful; official rhythms that dictate the terms of teachers' work; and the disruptive rhythms of students asserting their own power and privileges are demonstrated through the situated experiences of the teachers in this study and speak to a complex assemblage of interaction and social production that shape teachers' intercultural work.

This analysis provides a productive platform to discuss the messy realities of intercultural education in a school where local socio-historical practices appear resistive to alternative ways of being and knowing deemed incongruent with identities anchored in a 'white' sense of self and sense of belonging. Such an approach attempts to grapple with understanding the complexity of how the ambiguously shared 'routes' of intertwining histories continue to shape the present and may be disrupted to improve intercultural relations into the future.

Findings and discussion: "But we're not a multicultural school, so intercultural understanding is not a priority for us!"

Productions of cultural difference as the 'constitutive outside' of a dominant Hills imaginary

In the first focus group I had with participants I asked them to describe the Hills community and the local area. Fen—a leading teacher at the school, described the Hills as follows:

> This is a unique geographical situation and the kids or the students or the families of the community have a pretty interesting kind of profile…there's a lot of difference in terms of background, educational difference, political ideals, all sorts of stuff. It's really easy to go, "oh, it's monocultural". But it's really very different.

When asked to elaborate, Fen talked about the history of the region, with a particular focus on the geographical, social and economic borders between what is known as

the Flatlands, the Foothills and the Mountain. Fen also stated, even though the Hills looks to be very monocultural—that is to say, the majority of people are white—there is evidence of a lot of other differences, and these differences are incorporated into a common sense of what it means to be from the Hills. Lefebvre (1936) argues "a certain solidarity arises naturally in human communities" (p. 247) in the ways relations and practices of space come to constitute identity. In the Hills, Fen argued that social, material, economic, educational and political differences are not a barrier for cultivating a 'certain solidarity' within the community—these differences are accepted and often celebrated as part of the Hills identity as inclusive. Yet, this celebrated inclusivity did not appear to extend to culturally and linguistically diverse others.

Ani—another leading teacher at Hillside—suggested the Hills is "not like a new suburb" that has had to adapt with rapid urban development. The inaccessibility to large-scale urban development due to steep hills and valleys enables the Hills to be conceived as contained or 'already regionalised' to use Massey's (2005) term—physically and metaphysically detached from the external 'other' that lies beyond the geographical boundaries of the Hills. In this way, the imaginary of a Hills identity is constructed in relation to its constitutive outside—that which lies beyond. In the case of the Hills, this constitutive outside is characterised by the mass urban development and multicultural everyday of the suburbs that border the Flatlands. So even though difference is understood as part of the Hills identity, cultural difference—as understood in opposition to an already regionalised self—is not. This is captured in the following vignette describing some of my first experiences at the school.

> Hillside High School is a towering 1930s red brick institution solemnly standing on the side of the foothills as if it were surveying the surrounding village and bush. Despite the steep gullies and narrow valley, it is known as the 'Flatlands'. The Principal meets me in his office where we chat about the project and the school—he is concerned it will not be generative for me as it is predominantly a 'white' school. I insist that intercultural education is not about visible diversity in school communities, and we agree on a time for me to come back and present to the staff. I return after the holidays and speak briefly about the context for the study before providing some administrative details while encouraging teachers to volunteer to participate. The school's curriculum leader stands up after I present and cautions that the school has taken a 'conservative' approach to the curriculum's general capabilities—including Intercultural Capability, and as such the formal assessment of these capabilities occurs only in the languages. In what seems to be an attempt to be helpful to my recruitment efforts, he implores teachers from languages and the humanities to join my study. The Physical Education team immediately turn and high five each other—off the hook, perhaps.

Shortly after I presented a staff member who did not volunteer to participate in my study commented that "this is not a multicultural school, so intercultural understanding is not a priority for us. Maybe you should go to a more [visibly] diverse school". The above vignette and proceeding comment provide a useful reference point in relation to the construction of the Hills described by Fen and Ani above, whereby

intercultural capabilities can be seen to be positioned as a necessary occupation of diverse communities who may be perceived to need to fit in with the mores of dominant (white) Australia (Gunew, 2004). The vignette describes the implicit way assumed norms related to understanding culture and diversity is used to distribute the formal Intercultural Capability to the languages domain at this school regardless of official curriculum directives. In the first instance, this works to implicitly responsibilise some teachers for intercultural work while abdicating others, but simultaneously undermines everyday efforts to build intercultural understanding in ways that do not fit neatly into curriculum descriptors and learning objectives.

It is here, at the intersection of local school spaces and official curriculum policy where a level of tension arises in a deep throbbing rhythm. In Victoria, schools are required to explicitly embed, teach, assess and report on the Intercultural Capability across all areas of the curriculum. Yet, in this school setting, the production of intercultural understanding as the responsibility of languages—the assumed domain of culture—and as "not a priority" in this setting, illuminates how school spaces are constituted by complex social relations that exist and are lived beyond the aspirations of official curriculum and policy. I will take this point further in the next section.

The politics of 'hierarchies of value' in intercultural curriculum interpretation and translation

At Hillside, the domain of Languages other than English was made responsible for the Intercultural Capability. Teachers in other subject areas were encouraged to see "where they could fit it in within what they already do" (Fen). However, according to Ani, "if you're not assessing it, it's not even on your radar", demonstrating how the rhythms and demands of assessment and reporting cycles narrow the scope for teachers' work as it has become disciplined by accountability and performance. Despite the Intercultural Capability being the formal responsibility of languages, I observed examples of teachers doing intercultural work in informal and organic ways that were not captured in the formal mechanisms of reporting. One example of this is described in the following observation from a Year 7 Art class.

> Nic directs pairs of students to specific tables and explains to me "We are painting today. That makes me anxious. So, I need to mix up the table groups to avoid a disaster!" Students are working on an Indigenous art project exploring the significance of place and using symbols to represent life-maps—including places, people and events of significance. The students mostly traced the lines and contours of land maps to create shapes that they decorated as they wished in response to Indigenous prompts. Some students follow the lines or dots in patterns in abstract meanderings, enjoying the flow of pencil and paint on the page; some students mark their map with an Indigenous flag and animal symbols; some students trawl google earth 'street view' looking for their house or a past home; while others don't do anything much, doodling while talking about local football. Elliot sketches a guy, "just some guy" in blue biro. He wears a swastika on his t-shirt. He tells me "it's just a guy". I ask him directly

> about the swastika. Elliot simply says, "he needed to come from somewhere, belong to somewhere".

This moment struck me. There were students genuinely engaging with questions of place and belonging over time. Students were experimenting with Indigenous forms of representation and merging this with their own thinking about where and how they belong. Even Elliot, a 13-year-old boy brandishing a swastika on his drawing, was perhaps in some way grappling with his own history and what that means. This moment was a precipice for a deep dive into the relational spaces of identity, belonging, culture, and racism and how histories have shaped the ways Indigeneity and white supremacy are part of our identities today. Yet, this is far beyond what Nic can achieve in her class given she sees these students once a fortnight for one hour. Yet it is clear that this kind of project could be supported through work being done in other subject areas. When asked about this, Nic described approaching the English team to do an integrated project around stories and culture before commenting:

> I got really objectionable because they just wanted, like, didn't include us in any of the planning and then were like "oh, can you guys [art] do a heading?" Like, do a banner or some heading of a crappy poster page, and I was like "Fuck off!" If they'd included us in the planning, but not just like some offhand "here's what art can do".

Nic's reflection describes how Year 7 art is produced within the stratification of school subjects as a low-value subject and where the power of learning through Art is undervalued and undermined. In this situation, more powerful subject areas—like English—assert pressure and authority while appearing dismissive of Art as a subject area. This stratification, compounded by entrenched social practices that cut across directives for imagining and acting on the curriculum in response to the local school setting, quashes genuine opportunities for intercultural engagement. This was a problem also felt by graduate Japanese teacher Willo. Although for her, the problem was more complex as she is also required to assess the Intercultural Capability.

Lived spaces of intercultural tension and cultural mis-understanding

In ways similar to Art, Japanese is positioned near the bottom of the subject hierarchy, often at the whim of curriculum directives from higher up the chain. Willo described how the Intercultural Capability is imagined by the curriculum leader,

> In general it feels more top down rather than a bottom up kind of thing. It doesn't ever feel driven by languages, it feels more driven by maybe English, but still top down. So I don't know, it does feel a little imposed… it was only kind of this year that we ended up getting an email [from the curriculum leader], like, "oh can you guys [the language team] do this Intercultural Capability thing?"

Despite being responsible for the Intercultural Capability, according to Willo the way it is distributed removes professional agency and conversations related to

planning are ad hoc and dismissive. The capability is allocated, rather than distributed. This might be characterised by the curriculum leader's disclaimer when I first presented my project at the staff meeting, that the school has taken a 'conservative' approach to the capabilities, and the way the mechanisms of assessment and reporting dictate who is responsible and who is not. When considered in conversation with the common view of the school as 'monocultural' where "intercultural understanding is not a priority" the intercultural work that Willo and her team attempts can be easily undermined, as seen in the vignette below.

> It's period four on a Thursday: Year 9 Japanese. Students linger and jostle restlessly outside the classroom. Willo opens the door for the class and they bump to their seats before slouching in their chairs. The last student in closes the door and Willo instructs the class to stand ("hai, tatte kudasai"). Students stand complicitly, but they are not settled or attentive: boys swing their chairs on their legs, twirl pens in their fingers, smirk and poke each other; the girls pick at their fingernails, fidget with the hems on their skirts; some students gaze with seeming impatience at the strangeness of this performed ceremony. Willo greets the students in Japanese. They mumble a reply before she instructs them to sit - "hai! Suatte kudasai!" She provides instruction on today's activity, facilitates a recap discussion and directs students towards the task they need to complete. A boy sitting near me groans "why can't everyone just speak English?" Another exclaims "Japanese is taking over English!" and in a moment of sudden quiet another boy provokes "don't they eat dog?", causing a rumble of scoffing and jeering as two boys use generic Asian accents to make a mockery of 'Japanese' language and people.

In this vignette the students seem to display their disaffection towards Japanese in ways that Willo describes when asked as "them telling me they could not give a crap". It is these verbal and non-verbal disruptions to Willo's rhythms of teaching that create rhythmic dissonance, disruptions that work against the intention of Willo's lessons and the greater project of cultivating intercultural understanding. Yet, these rhythms are sustained by, according to Willo, "a lot of, I feel like, negativity around the idea of '*oh, do you like Japanese? Oh, are you going to continue*?' I feel like it's not seen as a positive thing to study a language". This attitude is perhaps emboldened by the construction of the Hills identity as described above and where the everyday space of the Japanese classroom is understood to signify the imagined space of the Hills "constitutive outside" (Hall, 1996). In representing 'otherness', Japanese comes to stand for the differences that are not part of the Hills and is rejected.

On reflecting on this proposition, Willo commented that she sees students perceiving culture as that which is different, and often, that which is considered 'weird' or 'strange', but also, that their culture is the 'ultimate'. This might be put down to the sheltered nature of the community and construction of the Hills identity, however, Art teacher Nic contended that understanding productions of cultural difference is of great relevance for students at Hillside *because* their everyday lives are sheltered from diverse ways of being in and knowing the world. Nic stated:

> This intercultural stuff is super important here because otherwise you get these kids who grow up and they go into the world and they think it's okay for a swastika or say "I was called a 'ranga' so therefore I'm in the same boat as some oppressed black person"… in my Year 9 class last semester there was this one boy, he's half Filipino, but he calls himself 'Chinga' and his friends call him that…He just doesn't care, he's just a bit sort of, "that's not racist". It's that complete 1950s Aussie mentality like, "this is me wog mate", and that's just the language that is used, it's just been completely normalised.

The language identified by Nic has deep historical roots. Terms like 'Chinga' and 'wog' are sadly part of the Australian larrikin vernacular that are often, as Hage (1998) asserts, used as a term of endearment one moment and weaponised in an assertion of power in the next—a reminder to non-white others that their belonging is precarious and peripheral (see also Elder et al., 2004; Haggis, 2004; Nicolacopoulos & Vassilacopoulos, 2004).

In her reflection, Nic described the normalisation of racialised language to position cultural difference as external to the Hills identity. These practices are demonstrative of ingrained rhythms resonant with the notion of a white possessive (Moreton-Robinson, 2015) deeply rooted in the 'routes' of colonial Australia. Under these conditions cultivating intercultural understanding is at odds with the normalisation of racialising practices as part of a Hills identity, whereby changing the nature of intercultural relations in this space requires more than a celebration of multiculturalism or raising awareness of diversity through language learning. Rather, it is because of the perceived lack of cultural diversity and the entrenchment of everyday racisms that a careful interrogation of the spaces in-between an imagined neutral self and racialised other is necessary to affect meaningful social change.

Concluding comments

Coming-to-terms-with-our-routes: understanding where we have been to reimagine what we may yet become

In Australia there is a complicated and reluctant relationship with race. Despite a shift in the political discourse from 'white Australia' to a successful and vibrant multicultural Australia (cf. Castels et al., 1988; Stratton & Ang, 1994; Walton et al., 2018), discourses that tend to celebrate multiculturalism rather than embody the origins of who Australia is as a nation of diverse peoples, continue (Gunew, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Nicolacopoulos & Vassilacopoulos, 2004). These discourses become silent reference points for how cultural diversity is articulated, understood and represented, which influence how the Intercultural Capability is interpreted and translated in schools.

Using Hillside High School as a case in point, this paper examines how unless there is a willingness to challenge and work with (and against) ingrained and situated relations with cultural difference, curriculum or policy levers will not necessarily move schools to act. It is apparent that it is not enough to simply

direct schools to do this work. Schools are busy places tasked with tackling the (perceived) social or educative crises of the day where education technocrats are indifferent to the realities surrounding teachers' time, access to resources, training and a collective sense of being compelled to act. The conundrum is not straightforward and this paper sets out to demonstrate the complexity of the issue, that is: intercultural understanding is everyone's responsibility and it is something that is not only taught in classrooms, but learnt through the social practices of place. However, the disconnect between curriculum and policy aspirations, and curriculum and policy requirements remain a significant hurdle for schools and teachers doing intercultural work. At its core, intercultural education for improved intercultural relations cannot be productively imagined as about a distant or foreign other, but should be more meaningfully directed towards understanding how 'coming-to-terms-with-our-routes' may inspire reimagining what we may yet become.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank my colleagues, A/Prof Scott Bulfin and Dr. David Bright for their unwavering support for this research.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions.

Declarations

Conflict of interest No direct or indirect financial or non-financial interest or benefit has arisen as a result of the work reported on in this paper. This research was conducted with the support of an Australian government RTP scholarship.

Ethical approval Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) approval number 12221. Department of Education (Victoria) Ethics Approval number 2018_003669.

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Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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