

# The journey of a teacher using Asian arts and literature with students in primary and middle school years

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## Introduction

This paper tracks the journey of a teacher's classroom practice following professional development in 2000. It is a narrative in which the writer has observed the teacher encountering both success and disappointment. From the perspective of the external 'Other', the writer aimed to chronicle and interpret the classroom practice of a teacher who had completed an extended course of professional development at the University of Western Sydney. The writer, from that university, has a research interest in arts learning. Nevertheless, the research took on a life of its own as the teacher's circumstances changed and became a key component of the narrative. The Graduate Certificate program, Teaching Studies of Asia, contributed to the completion of a Master of Education for the teacher; and subsequently research was initiated to critique her evolving practice in her classroom as a consequence of that program. The research methods adopted were interviews and discourse analysis. The teacher was interviewed at the end of the year in which the Graduate Certificate was undertaken about the ways in which she had implemented what she had learned from her study. At that time she provided access to integrated units of work (the Australian term for cross-disciplinary topics within a course) and policies she had created for the primary school setting in which she worked. Subsequently she was interviewed again in early 2005 when she provided access to units of work created for the high school setting into which she had moved. The narrative focuses, at one level, on engaging students with material that encourages understanding and admiration for different cultural expression and, at another level, on the teacher's aspirations for her work in the high school setting. Teaching Studies of Asia emphasises mobility and travelling for unpacking the identity formations and knowledge productions of transnational communities with cultural allegiances and political connections across a number of sites within and beyond the nation.

## Change globalisation and the arts

Since the 1980s, perhaps longer, Australia has been deciding what its future with Asia will be. In education, this has led to programs such as Access Asia in schools and the implementation of the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) modules in Teaching Studies of Asia offered by various universities. The Access Asia program aims to increase empathy, knowledge and understanding about the peoples and countries of Asia amongst teachers and students. It also provides professional development for teachers focused towards the design of quality Studies of Asia learning sequences. The National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy developed as a co-operative initiative of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. This strategy was in response to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Working Group on Asian Languages and Cultures report, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future*, which



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was endorsed by the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers at the COAG meeting in 1994.

The Asian Studies Council, that began its operations in 1988, intended that Australians should feel at home with Asian art, music, theatre and literature by the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It promoted the incorporation of Asia literacy in school curricula; but Singh (1995) cautions that the term 'Asia literacy' is intended to represent an Australian institutional response in helping to negotiate Australia's future repositioning in the region. With due regard to caution, the Teaching Studies of Asia program provided practical application of the theory that understanding another culture requires both knowledge and the development of attitudes and values (Halse & Baumgart, 1995). It also acknowledged that a re-orientation of Australian education to include curriculum with Asian frames of reference can be argued on the grounds of intellectual and cultural imperatives alone without reference to economic imperatives such as skilled migration and trade (Bishop & McNamara, 1998; Fitzgerald, 1997).

When it comes to the arts, Gleeson (2003, p. 5) argues that globalisation may be the new colonialism 'because its forces have the potential to be all-encompassing'. Its effects are more complex. There are good and bad outcomes in relation to globalisation in the arts. On the positive side there are the benefits of international exchange, the free flow of ideas and the potential gains from new communication technologies (Fensham et al., 2000). The negative effects lie in a possible standardisation of art forms as a consequence of the imbalanced global power relations dominated by the West. There is also a potential loss of respect in a global discourse where a non-dominant culture is received as an ethnic curiosity rather than an equal having its own cultural meanings (Gleeson, 2003). Multiculturalism, too, is problematic, if it is based on an idea where no culture can be judged by the criteria applied to another. In such a case, it is impossible to find common ground. The positive effect of these tensions is to challenge the West as the centre of globalisation (Hall, 1992).

Seares (2001, p. 13) reminds us that: 'It is in our works of art that we reveal to ourselves and others, the inner vision that guides us as a nation'. Globalisation, or preferably global exchange, plays a crucial role in allowing a nation to reveal itself and its culture to others, and to have that reciprocated. Indeed debates over globalisation and multiculturalism may find their best expression in arts that are taught, produced and discussed in the midst of such unresolved concepts.

In this era of globalisation, there are developments beyond the concept of multiple identities expounded in the 1980s-90s by film makers (Trinh 1989), novelists (Rushdie, 1991), sociologists (Sarup, 1996) and cultural theorists (Hall, 1996). In the past, such multiple identities have been explored for their relevance to migrant experience (Gingras, 1998). Now, Singh (2005, p 120) argues for the transformation of society through responsive education on the grounds that teachers must reassess 'curriculum narratives centred on dated articulations of global/national connectivities'. A preparatory ground seems to be offered by Wardani (2004) who writes of the state of being translated and translating the other as the process of translation.

Wardani's (2004) research has been re-examining postcolonial identities by critiquing the conflicting signifying process between Indonesian language and visual culture and the relationship of that conflict to the issue of Indonesian identity building. The metaphor of 'translation' is chosen with care as the Indonesian language is a relatively new one derived from many languages (Loschmann, 2004). The metaphor is extended in an image of a Babelian space that appears to get smaller and unified in a post-colonial world. In reality, Wardani (2004) argues that in such a space it is easier to encounter differences and that world multiculturalism is built on the paradoxes that arise in translation of those differences. Such a situation is always unstable, always in flux as individuals and communities are continually encountering hybrid meanings in the process of articulating their identity, of having that



translated, of 'listening' to the expressions of identities and of translating the other. Such mappings have the potential to diversify the modes of social and cultural intervention and multiply opportunities for the politicisation of minority citizens that go beyond ideas of supplement by challenging notions of a singular or hierarchical national space and narrative.

## Method

The data collected in this study consisted of teacher interviews and texts supplied by the teacher to demonstrate her practice. In providing a narration of a teacher, the writer has positioned herself as the external Other, with due regard to the advantage that gives for a 'wide-angle' vision (Wynter, 1992, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 262). In line with postmodern locating of the interpretive project, (Schwandt in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 p. 203), this research is less about an understanding that can be applied and more about an unravelling of the multiple meanings of notions of self, identity, objectivity and subjectivity. The researcher used semi structured interview technique, with a framework of key questions and flexibility to issues raised by the teacher. The researcher took an active role in interaction with the teacher. As noted by Schwandt (1997, p. 79 cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 663), 'It has become increasingly common in qualitative studies to view the interview as a form of discourse between speakers'. Foucault defines discourses as 'practices that systematically form the objects [and subjects] of which they speak' (1972, p. 49 cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 494). Foucault's thinking about discourse as social practice, demonstrated in concerns with social locations (in this research, a school), suggests the importance of understanding the practices of subjectivity. What Foucault calls discourse in practice is, in other words, 'the working mechanism of social life itself' (Gubrium & Holstein in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 494).

The Graduate Certificate in Teaching Studies of Asia had formed half of a Masters Coursework requirement for the teacher participant in this research. The teacher concerned had completed the Coursework requirements in mid 2000. The researcher addressed appropriate ethical requirements and obtained the consent of the teacher to track her subsequent teaching practice. The method involved two phases, with the initial phase aiming for immediacy of response and the second phase aiming for depth of response. In Phase 1, at the end of 2000, an interview took place with the teacher who had completed her higher degree study in the middle of the year and was in the process of implementing the ideas she had developed during the Teaching Studies of Asia course. The interview included but was not confined to questions about: any changes to her teaching practice; the nature of experiences planned in visual arts and music using resources from countries in Asia; the proportion of time in the study of Creative Arts that those experiences represented; any problems encountered in teaching about art forms from Asian cultures, the nature of students' responses to the experiences; and the school's implementation of the teacher's devised policy about including study of art forms from Asian countries. The data on teaching for this interview was coded in terms of planning and programming, policy, resources and student responses.

These questions were designed to briefly summarise what had been possible to implement in the six months after the completion of the teacher's study. In Phase 2, a further interview took place after four years to focus on developmental changes in the teacher's practice. When setting up this interview, it was necessary to take account of the change in workplace for the teacher from primary to secondary education. The interview drew upon questions about: activities that were influenced by the teaching Studies of Asia course; the impact of the course on the teacher's practice; the travel to China undertaken by the teacher and her use of that in the classroom; the extension to her teaching practice through her involvement in the



professional development of other teachers; the move the teacher had made from primary to high school teaching and the consequences of that change; and the benefits for students flowing from the teacher's professional growth. The data on teaching and learning was coded in themes of significance, engagement, deep understanding of traditional and contemporary art forms, knowledge of cultural change and avoidance of stereotypes. This coding formed the basis of one strand of the narrative. The data on teacher aspiration and workplace setting was coded in themes of integrated units of work (the name used in Australian schools for cross-disciplinary topics), collaborative planning and the imperatives of middle years strategies. This coding formed the basis of the second strand of the narrative.

In schools, generalist primary teachers using creative arts with Year 5 and 6 classes (NSW Stage 3) are following government mandates but are, nevertheless, something of a rarity (MCA & ASME, 2002). Among such teachers, those who implement learning experiences based on the cultures of neighbouring Asian countries represent an unknown quantity but it is estimated to be a small percentage. In terms of the Quality Teaching elements (NSW DET, 2003) such planning encompasses the elements of cultural knowledge, inclusivity and connectedness. Teachers who provide their students with opportunities to experience aspects of the cultures of Asian countries through their art forms are moving from what might be locally known towards a more global context. The journey of the teacher in these pages emerges in the context of government funded initiatives to move school educators towards an 'Asia-literate' Australia, facilitating communication in regional and global contexts (Garnaut, 1989; Fitzgerald, 1997). 'Jacqui' undertook the government-funded Teaching Studies of Asia course in 1999-2000. Jacqui is second generation Australian, her grandparents having migrated to Australia from Europe. At the time of undertaking the course, she had some 15 years experience of teaching in a primary school and was at that time teaching on a Year 5 class. Prior to studying, while she had taken on the role of Access Asia and NALSAS co-ordinator for the school, she had not travelled to any Asian country and spoke none of the languages of those cultures. She was motivated to take the course because she wanted to do the best she could in the NALSAS co-ordinator role, wanted to challenge herself and broaden her own knowledge. Indeed, the primary reason teachers undertake professional development is the desire to know more (Halse, 1996) in relation to the day-to-day operation of their classrooms (Guskey, 2002).

### **One teacher's journey**

At the end of 2000, Jacqui responded to a series of questions that asked about the changes made to her teaching practice and planning. She recalled that she had only taught Asian arts as part of a NALSAS unit of work in Human Society and its Environment (HSIE). When asked about differences from previous teaching, Jacqui said:

In implementing a unit of work on mandalas, I found that my students learned more about Asian culture and belief systems through the arts than they had previously in the HSIE unit. The mandala unit was something I found fascinating and stimulating and evoked a similar response from my students. Other than batik, puppets and the angklung, I knew nothing about Asian arts. However I am now launched on a wonderful journey. The students loved it and so did I. I've always enjoyed teaching new things and learning with my students.

This statement aligns with the aim of the Asian Studies Council for Australians to feel at home with Asian art, music, theatre and literature by the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It exemplifies the theory that understanding another culture requires more than knowledge alone (Halse & Baumgart, 1995). It demonstrates the importance of the teacher sharing her positive attitude



with students. Jacqui found the content fascinating and modelled that to the students in her class, learning alongside them. The unit Jacqui designed and implemented for her Year 5 students, on mandalas in Buddhist art, had several stages in it. First, the students had the opportunity to see a variety of mandalas, learn about their significance and research more information from websites. Then groups of students planned and designed sand mandalas. Lastly, students completed a class mandala using coloured paper and quilting designs, demonstrating this to another class. Students also completed reflection sheets on their learning about mandalas and Buddhist values.

Jacqui's description was corroborated with photographic evidence of the students' creations of the mandalas. These showed a level of engagement and deep understanding that was further developed in the written reflections of the students on their learning about symbolic meanings in traditional mandalas as well as newly created meanings in their own patterns. It was also evident in the writing of students in the other class to whom students in Jacqui's class demonstrated what they had been doing.

### School policy

One of the tasks the teachers were asked to do for the Teaching Studies of Asia course was to design an internal school policy for the inclusion of Asian arts in the Creative Arts curriculum. Teachers responded to this task by finding common ground between the Asia Education Foundation's (AEF) *Studies of Asia: A Statement for Australian Schools* (2000) and the NSW Board of Studies' *K-6 Creative Arts Syllabus and Support Documents* (2000). The AEF Statement declares that:

Australia's social and economic and political relationships with the Asian region heighten the need for educational policies and programs to improve knowledge and understandings by Australian students of the nations and cultures of Asia (2000, p. 1).

Jacqui was able to nest that statement within the Creative Arts Syllabus' more generalised support of the development of a tolerant and diverse society. Her rationale for the inclusion of Asian arts in the Creative Arts curriculum for her primary school was based on the way they provide

1. awareness and appreciation of Australia's multicultural society
2. insight into the history as well as the social, religious and cultural values of traditional and contemporary Asian societies
3. rich and diverse art forms which can be enjoyed by the school community
4. acknowledgement of the cultural heritage of many Australians
5. opportunities to explore ways Asian art forms have changed as a result of interaction with other cultures
6. opportunities to explore how Asian art forms have inspired the range of artistic expression in other cultures

The last points align with Fajardo's observations that the arts of Asia do not exist '*in an [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] ASEAN vacuum because global culture [is] made accessible by computer chips. [They] seep into our lives...and [are] transformed in our own cultures*' (1994, p. 65). The focus on appreciation of both traditional and contemporary in a selected Asian culture also addresses concerns (Singh, 1995) about Oriental fantasies that construe the essential difference between Asia and Europe as the ancient traditions of the one and the modernism of the other.



## Learning by moving

Jacqui travelled to China in 2001 to attend the Linking Latitudes Conference in Shanghai organized by Access Asia and the AEF. This gave her the impetus to devise a unit of work on China for students. Her travel took her into schools where she was very taken by the outstanding Creative Arts displays. For her school she bought multiple calligraphy sets and magazines for challenging stereotypical ideas that students might have developed through lack of experience of families from other cultures. She wanted her students to be aware of the way in which primary school-aged children in Shanghai had hobbies and favourite activities that were not so very different from their own. She set out to dispel the myths that can arise when the only resources children have access to in schools are to do with China's ancient past. For her personal resources, Jacqui had her name made on a stamp to use whenever she was marking students' work in the Chinese unit.

Jacqui, in the 2005 interview, confirmed that the Teaching Studies of Asia course had 'opened up a whole new world of learning; that I'd only learned European and American and Australian history.' Then when she travelled to China, she stated:

My strongest memories are of the people. I would get up early in the morning and walk with another teacher out on the streets in Shanghai. We would walk through the back streets and look at the markets; we would strike up conversations with grandparents that were walking their grandchildren to school; we'd look at the Tai Chi happening on the Bund. I guess we were totally immersed in looking at the way people started their day in a modern city in a different part of the world. In Beijing on the other hand, we had the chance to see the Forbidden City and to take in the fact that this is such an ancient, organized culture.

For Jacqui, this travel was an important affirmation of her taking on the role of NALSAS co-ordinator, the Teaching Studies of Asia course and her desire to learn more about the cultures of Asia through their art forms. She was reflecting, both at the time and afterwards, on what she was learning about her values and her personal growth: and she was also becoming aware of how her new understanding 'might influence others' (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005, p. 292). Her responses show an appreciation of both present and past; and her discussions with her Year 5 students, based on her memories of China – from the images of the people she would see on her early morning walks to the broadening and deepening of her understanding of its history – gradually opened their ideas to a world beyond their experience. She documented in her journal when they, in turn, told her what a difference it made to their ideas. The use of her own experience in the classroom helped her students understand on multiple levels: making sense of images that are the same and those that are different; considering aspects of Chinese culture; learning from their teacher's response to that culture in modern and ancient modes. Developing this, Jacqui devised a HSIE unit on how and why cultures change. In this way, her teaching reinvigorated curriculum content that she had previously implemented with her students.

## Secondment

Access Asia contacted the teachers who attended the conference and asked them to share what they had done; and Jacqui gladly did so. Her professional journey continued in a different role when she was seconded through the system in which she worked to be involved in the writing of units of work on the art forms of Asia. Her teaching ideas were circulated to schools and made available through a website. In this way, Wardani's (2004) idea of 'translating' culture became part of Jacqui's practice. In a sense, Jacqui embraced a kind of multiple identity (Sarup, 1996; Gingras, 1998) transformed, by her study and her travel, beyond her previous



Australian-of-European-heritage existence. Her sphere of influence widened from her own classroom to touch the students of other teachers who implemented units of work that she wrote.

Her commitment to integrated learning in the unit on cultural change led her to create links between English, visual arts, music and drama. She incorporated experience with Chinese Opera and Opera Masks. In the classroom, Jacqui took a simple story, dramatised it and accompanied it with improvised music. The students made their own paper mache masks. As Jacqui observed:

Through the story the students learned about Buddhist beliefs. We talked about the symbolism of sounds that accompany Chinese Opera, colours in the masks and what they mean, and the students' designs for the character they wanted to portray. When they displayed their masks they looked absolutely stunning. And they enjoyed wearing them.

For Jacqui, it is the art forms of the culture that reveal the inner vision of the people of that culture. Her view confirms the intellectual and cultural benefits of re-orienting Australian education to include curriculum with Asian frames of reference (as argued by Bishop & McNamara, 1998; Fitzgerald, 1997). Through the unit of work, her students reflected on what inner peace might mean and trialled simple Buddhist meditation techniques. Jacqui gave her students a voice in these classroom decisions and a 'safe' space in which to share their ideas. Her developing practice, in action research terms, was contributing to the creation of a quality learning environment. The students wrote about their interpretations of the story, created masks that showed the journey towards happiness and inner peace and improvised music that evoked the changing states of mind of the characters. Jacqui was interested in her students gaining knowledge of themselves as well as of other cultures. In this approach, Jacqui also aligns with Seares (2001) about revealing self and other through art forms.

## High school teaching

Jacqui moved to teaching in high school, wanting to teach Studies of Asia to older students. She had experienced the growth of Stage 3 students and confidently anticipated what students in high school might achieve. She was not dissatisfied by her primary school teaching but she in servicing of teachers had given her the opportunity to experience more complex learning interactions. She anticipated finding similar interactions in a high school setting, feeling that '*teaching Studies of Asia in a high school would be even more exciting.*' There have been both advantages and disadvantages in this move. On the positive side, she embarked on a Train-the-Trainer course implementing the use of Access Asia's Voices and Visions CDROMS, enabling her professional development of teachers to include those resources for senior English students.

In her own high school teaching in Stage 4 English, she incorporated texts that would allow students to explore Asian story. From looking at European texts, she would move to wider reading projects on such topics as people whose lives have been displaced by war. Whenever she could she would encourage students to read novels that had more focus on Asian cultures, such as *Chinese Cinderella*. She explained:

With my Year 8s, I'm doing a drama unit on Romeo and Juliet. So we're looking at the Shakespeare text, the Baz Luhrmann film and an Asian film called 'The Chicken Rice War'. That's set in Singapore and has two young people fall in love from two rival families. We're simultaneously looking at the expression of love across cultures. I use a simple series of questions about what the art form is, where was it made and who is the audience to whom it speaks. From the Voices and Visions resource, I'll incorporate video clips and



contemporary poetry that show emotions that are common amongst all cultures. I think that when students in high schools look at Asian-based texts, they see that there are universal themes. Using such texts challenge the stereotypes. And that's where I like using these resources to increase students' awareness. This area [in which the school is located] is still very insular and children don't have much experience of thinking they belong in a diverse society or what their place in the world is.

Jacqui documented student discussions on expressions of emotion in different cultures in her teaching journal. She reflected on her choices of stimulus material and how they positively engaged the students in learning about such themes as love, hate, despair and the resolution of conflict. Students commented that the emotions shown in both films were deeply felt. They went on to identify other film examples they had seen that reinforced a stereotype that they would now question. Giroux (1992) writes that, through a postmodern perspective, the cultural relations of the centre and periphery are seen with more clarity. There is a challenge to the 'hegemonic notion that Eurocentric culture is superior to other cultures and traditions' and Giroux protests against the expunging of 'the stories, traditions and voices of those who, by virtue of race, class and gender constitute the Other' (1992, p. 55). In studying film, students can develop an understanding of the social construction of individuals and of subjectivity. This, in turn, allows students to 'begin to acknowledge the many different interpretations of the world and appreciate this difference' (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 1999, p. 36). Macnaughton (1998) also states that teachers can assist students to deconstruct their understandings of racial and cultural meanings, offer alternative meanings and facilitate discussion of the exercise of power of some peoples and cultures over others. In simple tasks, Jacqui led her students to experience a different kind of globalisation – one in which the idea of the free flow of ideas (Fensham et al., 2000) and the potential gains from communication technologies such as film is lived out.

Giroux (1992) also states that new forms of knowledge emerge through a postmodern emphasis on breaking down disciplines. One of the things that Jacqui missed in her high school teaching was the possibility to teach through integrated (cross-disciplinary) units of work. The Year 8 classes Jacqui taught for English and for Religious Studies were not the same students. Furthermore, the disadvantage for Jacqui in the move to high school has actually meant less teaching that brings Studies of Asian cultures into the classroom. Such teaching would have been most easily located in subject choices above Year 8 level. However, as a former experienced primary school teacher, the executive of her new workplace saw the potential for Jacqui to be an important force in transition to high school as students enter Year 7 and through Year 8. While she has fulfilled this expectation, taking on a co-ordination role, it was not then, and does not remain now, her motivation for change. In fact, she states:

I actually, perhaps, came to high school on false pretences. And each year when we write down our preferences for the next year, I've put that I'd like to teach in Asian Studies. In the new syllabus for HSIE, there is scope for teachers to do optional units on Asia. That hasn't happened. But we have quite a well resourced library; we have lots of textbooks in teaching Studies of Asia and we offer Japanese and Chinese language at the school. I'm also disappointed at my own children's primary school that there is nothing offered involving Asian studies.

It is a great loss that a teacher so ready to embrace the teaching of different cultural experiences in her school has been deflected from doing so as a result of the middle years agenda of the high school. She acknowledges that she is *good with juniors and a good transition person*; but her own professional need was to move in another direction and it has



not happened for her. To some extent, there may be an unconscious playing out of the hierarchy of primary and secondary school teachers in this aspect of Jacqui's story. There has certainly been a priority of the institution's needs over the teacher's; and that appears from an external perspective to be short-sighted.

### **Jacqui's teaching and learning strategies in integrated units of work**

Jacqui's story is one that demonstrates the process of translating other cultures for and with her students. In her former primary school, her Stage 3 integrated unit of work on how and why cultures change incorporated many skills for the students. They defined the word 'culture', creating a concept map of the elements that combine to form and develop a culture. The students broke into groups to make landform maps of China and created charts to explain the population statistics for China and Australia. They researched and made timelines of Chinese historic, scientific and technological events. In pairs or groups the students worked to map cultural influences on Australian identity and on Chinese identity. On Venn diagrams they recorded similarities and differences of Chinese family life and Australian family life in the past and of both cultures in the present. From these diagrams, they discussed the common family values of both cultures, past and present. The students explored the history of Chinese migration to Australia and dramatised their learning through techniques such as hot seat and readers' theatre. They researched and conducted Power Point presentations about the influence on Australian society of Chinese festivals, Feng Shui, Chinese medicine, cuisine and horticulture. They created information brochures on China's contributions to world heritage, about such sites as the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and the Terracotta Warriors. Jacqui was able to talk with her students about her own experiences of seeing these.

The importance of Jacqui's sharing of experiences with students is nested in Action Research principles. She was involved in reflecting on her own thinking and the ways it was becoming more inclusive and more differentiated (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005). Simultaneously, she was planning and implementing experiences that would encourage students to reflect on their thinking. To complete this unit, the students created two picture walls, one using images of traditional and contemporary Chinese society and the other of Australian society. In groups, the important information on each wall was first recorded as a series of issues and then reduced to a handful of main ideas. The final step for the students was to reduce the key ideas into what the group consensus believed to be the key message.

Jacqui was proud of her year 5 class's achievement in this unit. Her experience in teaching in a primary school was that the students were open to absorb new learning experiences. She states that *If I'd packed the primary students on a bus and taken them to Cabramatta [a Sydney suburb] and said this is Vietnam, or to Chinatown [in the centre of the city] and said this is China, they would have believed me; because a lot of the students don't even travel to Sydney. So they are not aware of our multicultural population; but they were happy to be challenged with new content and processes of learning.* This statement was borne out in the ways in which the students researched topics, recreated narratives in their own words, considered the impact that music would have on their presentation and in so many ways demonstrated their knowledge.

However she has not been able to implement integrated units of work in high school. She taught her unit of work on Mandalas within a visual arts context to assist the visual arts teachers at a time when the school's building program meant that art teaching could not take place in the art rooms. The art co-ordinator commented that the boys especially loved the unit. Jacqui speculates that it might have been the highly organized drawing of the mandala that appealed to them; but she is not able to support that speculation as without continuously teaching the class, she missed the student feedback at first hand. Jacqui has shared resources



that explored Asian cultures from *Voices and Visions* with teachers of Year 11 students to provide context for some of the work they do in English. Nevertheless, in the high school, there has been little collaborative planning across disciplines that would promote the kind of rich, multi-layered learning that Jacqui had been able to bring to her primary classroom and model to other teachers on the staff there and in professional development courses. Furthermore, Jacqui believes that there are teachers who tend to use resources, texts and repertoire that they have always used:

When I've spoken at conferences, I've tried to show other teachers that I don't have all the answers. I've only visited one Asian country. But I've read a lot, got some resources and been motivated to get to know more about Asian Studies. It's amazing the impact that it has on the kids when they can recognise what a symbol means. You're opening up a little more of the world for them. I try to encourage teachers who are yet to travel in Asia that they can teach this. You have to have the right mindset.

Fensham et al. (2000) argued for the benefits of international exchange and Jacqui's practice embodies that notion. In her primary classroom, Jacqui was able to put aside outdated thinking about the ways in which Australia connects with Asian countries, as argued by Singh (2005); and to listen to the expressions of identity of the other (Wardani, 2004). In her high school classrooms, she has been curtailed in her desire to engage students in integrated learning about Asian cultures at a more complex level. To a large extent she has been asked to teach on Stage 4 and, within that Stage, she has not been able to have the same class of students for several subjects such as History, Studies of Religion and English, that might have facilitated her engaging the students with multiple skills.

Teachers in many places can see Studies of Asia as outside the mainstream of curriculum. By contrast and in line with emerging frameworks of teaching standards, Jacqui sees professional knowledge as a core component of teaching. Her taking on the course initially both enriched the work she was already doing and opened up further possibilities in employment, mentoring and publication. She is keen to see students as 'global citizens'; and in her primary classroom she had her students looking at projects that AusAid were conducting and encouraged them to discuss case studies of such issues as child labour in India. Inspired by Access Asia resources, she had taught an integrated unit of work that looked at global connections and debated why links with Asian neighbours were important.

## Conclusion

The decision to research the changing practice of a teacher using Asian art forms and literature grew out of a goal to remove some of the complexities that primary school teachers might find in using unfamiliar cultural resources. From the perspective of the 'external Other', the writer commenced the research with the professional audience of primary school teachers in mind. As the narrative developed, the writer's goal has also changed. Researchers such as Bauman (1993) and Noddings (1990) (both cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 204) argue for an ethic of closeness, care and relatedness in the interaction between researcher and participant; and in such a framework, ethical relationship is 'grounded in the notion of being-for the Other' (ibid. p. 205). The writing of this narrative has been framed from such a perspective. In this instance researcher and teacher share the same cultural heritage, with multiple epistemological positions. Nevertheless, both researcher and teacher have been conscious of 'walking out of one culture and into another' (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.77).

This observation of a teacher's journey is part of a broader context of social and cultural research that assists in the analysis of transnational communities, their histories and cultures. Teachers are encouraged to reflect critically on their actions; and be aware that they can



‘consciously, if humbly, influence where [society] is going’ (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005, p. 52). More importantly however, the relational approach between transnational communities and Asian arts and literature has opened up spaces for a specifically Australian inflection to, and extension of, current articulations of transnationalism and curriculum inquiry. The teacher in this study endeavours to teach in a way that understands the world in which both she and her students are located now; she is looking beyond existing practices, questioning them with respect to larger social issues. She is consciously trying to meet needs of the students that were not being met before; and she is concerned with long term consequences. The mode from which she operates is one of continuing cycles of action research and reflection. Her current workplace is a few steps behind her.

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