

# Towards reflexive ethnicity: Museums as sites of intercultural encounter

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In a highly globalised world with increasing ethno-nationalistic tensions and conflicts, the importance of intercultural education has never been greater. The challenge remains, however, as to whether educating for mutual respect and social cohesion can be achieved through traditional modes of schooling or whether additional approaches that are not necessarily school-centric are required. Drawing on in-depth qualitative data including video diaries, narrative interviews and focus groups with Australian secondary school students and semi-structured interviews with teachers, this paper discusses such an endeavour in which a museum exhibition on identity and belonging is employed as an interactive space for meaningful encounter among students and as a form of professional learning that enlivened teaching practice. Using the concept of reflexive ethnicity, this paper examines whether cognitive and affective encounters outside the ‘school gate’ create opportunities for critical learning about ethnicity that can complement and enhance school curricula and classroom learning. More importantly, the paper explores how the possibility of building on such activities to create and sustain teaching practice can challenge entrenched static notions of ethnicity. The paper concludes that reflexive encounters with ‘difference’ within an interactive museum space can unsettle prejudice and provide a deeper and more meaningful understanding of ethnic identity that goes beyond rote classroom learning.

**Keywords:** identity; museum; reflexive ethnicity

## Introduction

The 2006 UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education emphasise ‘the need for tolerance and respect of all peoples in the world through the inclusion of human rights principles in the school and the curriculum’ (UNESCO, 2006, p. 7). In education research, schools are viewed as microcosms of society and in many ways reflect broader human interactions and social dynamics (Waller, 1932; Boocock, 1973; Pohan, 2003). As such, this calls for a transformative dimension of intercultural education is all the more pertinent in the current international climate, dominated as it is by a hyper-securitised agenda (Mansouri & Lobo, 2011). Indeed, this is even more pertinent today than a decade ago when it was noted that, ‘in a world experiencing rapid change, and where cultural, political, economic and social upheaval challenges

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traditional ways of life, education has a major role to play in promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence' (UNESCO, 2006, p. 8).

The escalation in international conflicts and associated intercultural tensions, in particular since the 9/11 events and the subsequent wars on terror (Modood *et al.*, 2006; Cesari, 2010; Hage, 2011; Mansouri, 2015), has heightened the need for creative approaches through broader educational avenues in order to initiate and sustain positive encounters between people from different ethnic, racial, cultural and religious backgrounds and in particular among youth. Substantial research, particularly in the area of prejudice reduction, has found that pedagogical approaches that focus primarily on knowledge acquisition are not enough to facilitate positive intercultural relations (e.g., Pedersen *et al.*, 2011). Instead, what is required is a more reflexive understanding of one's own sense of identity and belonging that is framed in relation to others within situations that support positive intercultural contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). To support this call for more creative and critical approaches that foster reflexivity, counter prejudice and engage with broader socio-political issues, the arts and in particular museum exhibitions have been called upon to create spaces where visitors can reflect on their own biases through meaningful intercultural encounters (Sandell, 2007).

Internationally, and particularly since the 1990s, museums have started to engage seriously with 'difficult' social issues around ethnic and cultural diversity especially in relation to cultural identity, contested belongings, prejudice and racism (Bonnell & Simon, 2007; Sandell, 2007). This shift has since accelerated in response to increased global flows and interconnections, which have challenged nation-states not only to face a social environment characterised by "super-diversity" . . . but a "hyper-diversity" in which the proliferation of differences produces a dynamism that alters processes of interethnic identification and connection' (Noble, 2011, p. 830). In other words, nation-states are nowadays not only more ethnically diverse but also exhibit more complex forms of diversification within and between different ethnic groups. Rather than taking a normative approach to ethnicity wherein ethnic groups are reified as 'authentic' and displayed for public consumption (Durrans, 1988), museums have the capacity to take a critical pedagogical approach by paying attention to 'the processes of showing, who takes part in those processes and their consequences for the relations they establish between the museum and the visitor' (Bennett, 1995, p. 103). In Australia, the Migration Museum in Adelaide (Szekeres, 2002) and the Immigration Museum in Melbourne (Witcomb, 2013; Schorch, 2015) have sought to open up spaces for engaging with contested Australian histories of migration and their representation in museum exhibitions. Witcomb (2013, p. 256) argues that critical pedagogical practice within museums can 'provoke unsettlement in their viewers by playing with their collective memories about the past, challenging them to rethink who they think they are and who they think they are viewing'. This pedagogical approach positions museums at the forefront of critical inquiry into contemporary social issues by engaging visitors as active participants with their own diverse and complicated histories.

Although there is a growing body of empirical work about the effectiveness of museum-based learning (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007) and how visitors engage with interactive and immersive museum exhibitions (Whitehead *et al.*, 2015), less is

known about the impact that museums have on visitors' understanding of complex subject matters such as ethnic identity (Sandell, 2007). This paper aims to contribute to educational research on how museums can facilitate reflexive and in-depth engagement with concepts such as cultural identity by examining how encounters with ethnic and cultural difference can go beyond learning 'about others'. To examine how secondary students in this study engaged more deeply with their sense of ethnic identity, the paper draws on the theoretical concept of 'reflexive ethnicity' (Pieterse, 2004; Hussain & Bagguley, 2015).

First, reflexivity can be broadly defined as a process of critical self-reflection through which individuals become aware of their own subject-positions within a particular cultural framework and in turn, how this positioning influences and shapes how they view and behave in the world (Kleinsasser, 2000). Both Pieterse (2004) and Hussain and Bagguley (2015) draw on reflexivity to develop a nuanced analysis of ethnic identification. Hussain and Bagguley (2015, p. 1) define 'reflexive ethnicity' as the 'different ways of relating to ethnic identity'. Critically, this concept focuses on the circumstances that mediate people's actions rather than viewing ethnic identity as simply a matter of 'ethnic choice'. Along similar lines, Pieterse (2004) also raises the question and possibility of reflexive ethnicity by outlining variations of ethnicity, which are broad categories characterised in relation to social, political and cultural dynamics. Both conceptualisations of 'reflexive ethnicity' emphasise the social milieu that informs ethnic identification rather than a simple matter of individual choice or expression.

The concept of reflexive ethnicity was first empirically developed by Hussain and Bagguley (2015) in the context of British adults from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, White, African-Caribbean, Indian and Muslim backgrounds who were exploring their 'ethnic' identity in the aftermath of the London bombings on 7 July 2005. Drawing on Archer's (2012) and Lash's (1994) concepts, Hussain and Bagguley (2015) delineated three different forms of reflexive ethnicity, which included: (i) 'autonomous cognitive reflexive ethnicity' (taken-for-granted ethnic identity without need for discussion to affirm this identity); (ii) 'communicative cognitive reflexive ethnicity' (taken-for-granted ethnic identity that is prompted or confirmed through discussion with people with similar self-described ethnic identities); and (iii) 'meta-reflexive hermeneutic' or aesthetic reflexive ethnicities, which refer to socially mediated heightened awareness of ethnic identity in relation to meaning-making processes (hermeneutic) or in relation to everyday life and cultural practices (aesthetic). For example, Hussain and Bagguley (2015) found that people who described themselves as White-British tended to demonstrate autonomously reflexive cognitive or communicative ethnic identities because their identity was often stated as an unproblematic fact or affirmed through discussion with the interviewer who was also White-British. Autonomous cognitive reflexive ethnicity is similar to Pieterse's (2004, p. 33) concept of 'dormant ethnicity' in which 'intergroup contacts have no or little salience' and so there is very little reflexivity and low awareness of ethnic identity. The difference is that someone with 'dormant ethnicity' may not only take their ethnicity for granted but also feel it has little salience, whereas someone with autonomous cognitive reflexive ethnicity may feel that their ethnic identity is salient but does not require intergroup contact for this to be the case.

Comparatively, in Hussain and Bagguley's (2015) study, people from Muslim or ethnic minority backgrounds explained that they were often asked to state their religion or where they were from and so in the process were *a priori* made hyper-aware of their ethnic or religious identity. In the interviews, they talked about ethnic identity by reflecting on the past and present personal and social circumstances that shape their ethnic identity (meta-reflexive) and the everyday cultural practices that inform and affirm their ethnic identity (aesthetic).

In this paper, we draw on the theoretical concept of 'reflexive ethnicity' (Pieterse, 2004; Hussain & Bagguley, 2015) to examine how Australian secondary school students understood and related to key concepts of ethnicity and culture after visiting a museum exhibition that explicitly dealt with ethnicity, identity and belonging. The broader research question that informs our study is, 'What is the effect of the IYMO exhibition on the attitudes, emotions, beliefs and behaviours of Victorian students in Years 10-12 in relation to racism, cultural diversity and racial and ethnic identity?'. In this paper, we examine how students' experiences in the museum activated a sense of reflexive ethnic identity and how museum-based learning can augment teaching practice. The paper begins with a critique of ethnicity as it is taught in the Australian secondary school Year 12 sociology curriculum. Then, drawing on qualitative data from the study, we explore how the concept of 'ethnicity' was enlivened during the students' visit to the museum exhibition by examining the different ways students understood and related to ethnic identity in relation to different types of 'reflexive ethnicity'. We conclude with teachers' perspectives about how the museum helped to invigorate teaching practice in order to draw attention to the importance of reflexive and experiential learning for teaching about ethnicity. Finally, we identify study limitations and provide suggestions for future research.

## **Methods and participants**

This paper draws on a larger research project funded by the Australian Research Council that examined the impact on students of the *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* (IYMO) exhibition at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Australia. The study was conducted between 2013 and 2014 and involved eight Year 12 classes, one Year 10 and one Year 11 class across seven secondary schools, with the majority (five schools) located in outer metropolitan Melbourne (in the state of Victoria) and two schools in regional Victoria. The schools that participated in this project were recruited after they made initial contact with museum staff. After making a booking for the museum visit, teachers were informed that a researcher would make contact with them and the school's principal to invite their class to be involved in the research evaluation. Informed consent was received from students, students' parents (for students under 18), teachers and principals. All participants were in Year 12 except for five in Year 11 and one in Year 10. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants and schools. Ethics approval was received from Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (#2013\_008) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (#2013\_001878).

The evaluation utilised a multi-method longitudinal approach including video diaries, narrative interviews and focus groups with 76 secondary school students and

semi-structured interviews with six teachers (Schorch *et al.*, 2015). Focus groups and narrative interviews were conducted two weeks after (T2) students attended the exhibition and again three months later (T3) to assess any longer-term impacts. The focus group schedule centred on themes gathered from the IYMO exhibition, which included stereotypes, identity, citizenship, belonging, racism and bystander anti-racism. The focus groups (approx. 1 hour each, 19 total) were designed to establish group consensus and points of convergence (Rabiee, 2004; Robson & McCartan, 2016) about the themes in the exhibition. In order to facilitate focus groups that 'allow issues and perspectives to emerge and to be discussed' (Newby, 2014, p. 366), some of the prompts we used in reference to different parts of the exhibition included: 'What did you think when you saw it? Was there anything that surprised you? Was there anything that you found challenging? Are there any particular situations or events that come to mind?'. During the focus group (approx. six students each), students provided examples of everyday experiences at home and school, thus drawing connections with their experience of the exhibition. The narrative interviews (approx. 15–30 minutes each, 16 students at T2 and 11 at T3) were used to provide an understanding of students' experiences of the exhibition without semi-structured prompts used in the focus group. The interviewer asked students to begin wherever they liked in terms of talking about themselves and their experiences in the exhibition. This narrative approach (Wengraf, 2001) elicited student narratives about aspects of the exhibition that resonated with their personal experiences (Schorch, 2015). A total of 18 students recorded a video diary during their exhibition visit. This method was used to provide a more intimate, sensory and immediate account of the students' experiences as they moved through the exhibition (Bates, 2013). As a visual method, the video diaries provided an affective additional lens through which we could understand students' experiences in the exhibition that enriched the data from the focus groups and narrative interviews. The video diaries also provided an informal medium through which young people could express themselves, which is particularly useful when understanding complex issues (Guillemin & Drew, 2010). Students were asked to record their experience in the exhibition by focusing on things that interest or surprise them and why and also to reflect on content that relates to experiences they have had or someone else they know.

Focus groups were facilitated by three female researchers who identified as having white, Jewish, Anglo-Australian and Korean American racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Most of the narrative interviews were conducted by a male researcher with a white German background. All focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service and quality checked by the first author. Video diaries were transcribed verbatim including descriptions of students' affective responses and objects/exhibition sections the students filmed. Participants received \$20 gift cards to thank them for their time and contribution to the study. For students who participated in the narrative interviews and video diaries, there was an even gender balance due to purposive sampling, which aimed to include one boy and one girl from each class. Conversely, the number of participants in the focus groups was more skewed toward girls, which reflects a larger proportion of girls to boys in the classrooms.

The transcripts were thematically coded using initial line-by-line coding and then coded into themes and sub-themes based on an analysis of similarities and differences across the focus groups, narrative interviews and video diaries (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Using qualitative analysis software, NVivo 10, themes emerged through inductive coding as well as *a priori* codes based on themes in the focus group schedule. Themes examined in this paper include teacher expectations of IYMO, the value of IYMO, the impact of IYMO on students' understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity and racism, and IYMO's influence on teaching practice.

### **Critiquing curriculum approaches to ethnicity**

Four of the 10 student classes that visited the museum and participated in this study were completing Year 12 VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) Sociology. The sociology course covered four units. The unit associated with the excursion to the IYMO exhibition was: Unit 3 Culture and Ethnicity (VCAA, 2011). In the unit, the students focus on two 'areas of study', which include Australian Indigenous cultures and the concept of ethnicity in relation to Australia's migration history. The key outcomes for the area of study on ethnicity are centred on conceptual knowledge about sociological theories of race, ethnicity, ethnocentrism and cultural relativism. The students also learn about hybrid identities with a focus on Stuart Hall's theories of cultural hybridity (Hall, 1990). As part of the recommended activities for this unit, especially for the area of study on ethnicity, teachers are encouraged to attend an exhibition at the Immigration Museum. The other classes included two classes studying an 'Identity and Belonging Unit' within Year 10 English/VCE English and two classes within English as an Additional Language (EAL). There were also two classes studying the 'Identity Strand' within VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) literacy classes as part of the Personal Development Skills units. Although the VCE sociology classes focused more explicitly on ethnicity with a whole unit dedicated to it, the curriculum content in the other classes also related to understanding identity, belonging and broader social issues. Because of the explicit educational relevance to the unit, the teachers and students already expected that the exhibition visit would enhance their understanding of topics they had been discussing in class around ethnicity, migration, identity and belonging. All of the six teachers<sup>1</sup> who were interviewed agreed that the IYMO exhibition was highly relevant to the curriculum content that they teach, particularly for English, Sociology, History and Literacy. This was the main reason they decided to take their students to the exhibition:

If you have someone who's teaching the subject I think it's a useful resource, I think it's a useful tool for teaching and implementing that unit and I have spoken to some other teachers who have been to the Immigration Museum during this exhibition and have thought it wonderful. (Brett, Harford Teacher Interview)

I went online and then noticed that there was one [exhibition] specific for ethnicity and immigration so I thought [it would] expose the students a little bit more. (Helen, Bayside Teacher Interview)

The reason why we took our kids there was, because part of our coursework. We're doing a unit on identity and belonging and we wanted our students to explore that. (Mandy, Kensington Teacher Interview)

As these quotes illustrate, before they visited the museum, the teachers felt the exhibition would extend their content knowledge for the purposes of classroom teaching. They also expected that the exhibition visit would be an extension of their coursework or simply part of what they were already learning. However, as discussed below, the exhibition provided much more than simply an extension of the classroom space.

In the VCE sociology curriculum, ethnicity is defined as ‘particular cultural features that are shared by a distinctive group or population’ (VCAA, 2011, p. 51). There is also a statement that points out that ‘the way that a group sees itself might not correspond to the way that outsiders see it’ and also explains that ‘ethnicity is not fixed and unchanging ... [and is] shaped through a variety of political and social forces’ (VCAA, 2011, p. 20). Although these statements denote some dynamic movement when understanding ethnicity, this definition still assumes a static in-group/out-group binary without sufficiently accounting for the blurriness of ethnic boundaries, the diversity within and between ‘ethnic groupings’ and complex processes of identification that inform those boundaries (Barth, 1969; Eriksen, 2010).

Furthermore, throughout the VCE Sociology curriculum, ethnicity is mainly understood and taught at a conceptual and theoretical level. There is one key outcome in the curriculum that aims to bring an ‘experiential element’ to the theoretical work on ethnicity and culture, which involves an assessment of students’ understanding of a particular ethnic group’s experiences in relation to the group’s identification, material and non-material culture, cultural activities and challenges they experience in society (VCAA, 2011). However, even this experiential element remains less of a reflexive exercise and more centred on learning *about* ‘other’ people who ‘have ethnicity’, which reinforces the idea of static ethnic group boundaries (Carter & Fenton, 2010). Furthermore, this understanding of ‘ethnic group’ is based on being able to ‘identify’ a set of cultural criteria that ‘define’ different ‘ethnic groups’.

If classroom activities and discussions are centred on learning *about* the characteristics of different ethnic groups, there is a tendency to elide the process through which ethnicity is socially, historically and culturally constructed, negotiated and contested and more about *defining* ethnic groups. This approach inadvertently presents ethnicity and ‘ethnic groups’ as largely static and bounded. Furthermore, without a critical understanding of the processual and situated characteristics of ethnicity, there is also the risk of reinforcing totalising assumptions that equate ethnicity with ‘race’<sup>2</sup> and culture. The VCE Sociology curriculum states that ethnicity is a concept that is used instead of ‘race’ with the claim that ‘most sociologists prefer to focus on the concept of ethnicity rather than race’ (VCAA, 2011, p. 20). This claim is dubious given the breadth and depth of critical sociological studies on race, especially in education (Gillborn, 1995; Stevens, 2007; Walters, 2012; Race & Lander, 2014). Moreover, as Barker (1981) argued with his concept of ethnicity as the ‘new racism’, ethnicity is still often used in the same delimiting ways that race is often used to refer to one aspect of someone’s background as if it constitutes the whole of that person.

Given this limited conceptual focus on ethnicity in the curriculum and as demonstrated in a systematic review of multicultural education and student learning (Zirkel, 2008), how students learn about ethnicity in the classroom is mainly centred on acquisition of knowledge about ‘difference’ rather than building a deeper understanding of how this knowledge is constructed and what these concepts mean as lived

experiences in contemporary socio-political contexts. Drawing on Banks' and Banks' (2004) multicultural education framework, Zirkel (2008, p. 1169) found that multicultural content integration is the most common educational practice because it 'requires only a superficial reworking of the curriculum . . . [and] does not demand us as educators to rethink how knowledge is constructed or to make dramatic changes in our pedagogical practices'. By focusing mainly on incorporating content, students tend to learn *about* people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds rather than through a more engaged and reflexive understanding that humanises 'difference' (Schorch, 2015) while becoming aware of their own positionality in critical ways. The next section analyses the impact of the museum experience on students' openness and reflexive understanding of ethnic and cultural diversity.

### **Activating reflexive ethnicity in the museum space**

In contrast to learning about ethnicity in the classroom, the museum experience provided an opportunity to interact with people's stories as if they were talking to or listening to a particular person rather than simply learning 'about' someone perceived as fundamentally 'different' to them. There were students who mainly viewed the exhibition as a resource where they gained additional knowledge. However, they also described this knowledge as providing increased awareness and openness toward an array of experiences that people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds have in Australia. This exposure to ethnic and cultural difference was particularly powerful for students from White-Anglo backgrounds. For example, White-Anglo students commented:

It definitely opened my eyes . . . 'cause I've never really seen it first-hand like I did there. (Sandra, Bayside, T2 Narrative Interview)

I don't know, kind of like I guess it gave me a bit more insight into what people feel like when they've come here from other countries. Didn't really know much about that. (Harford T3 Focus Group 2014)

And, I guess, helped us all . . . we can now talk about it more, have more knowledge on it, so we can talk about it in deeper context. (Woodlane T3 Focus Group)

These students describe an initial openness that provided a starting point for deepening their awareness and understanding of other people's experiences beyond a cognitive level.

Building on this increased awareness and knowledge, there were also other students from both White-Anglo and ethnic-minority backgrounds who described a deeper experience of engagement, which activated feelings of empathy and openness through an affective connection with the person whose story they were immersed in. As Witcomb (2013, p. 267) argues in the context of the role of museums, 'By engaging the viewer in a very direct and physical way, objects are able to activate an emotional response' by creating a 'simulation of dialog' between the viewer and the person who is sharing their experience. Integral to this dialogue is that upon entering the exhibition, the viewer brings their past and their 'partial knowledge' to the present and specifically, to the museum space. Through interacting with the other person's story, they could then 'extend that partial knowledge' at both cognitive and affective levels



(Witcomb, 2013, p. 267). For the students and their experience in the exhibition, it was also more than just a dialogue; there were non-verbal aspects that were also important including the feeling of emotion conveyed through stories as well as the images, body gestures and sounds.

Even if students could not readily relate to the stories, they could still have a felt connection with the stories of people positioned as 'other'. By listening to the people's stories in the touchscreen videos or picking up an audio handset,<sup>3</sup> they could feel connected to that person by imagining what it would be like to be in their position. In this sense, the inter-subjective connection fostered perspective-taking and empathy and helped the students to imagine what it is like to be 'othered' through the 'othering' experiences told by people in the interactive displays. This shift toward what it feels like to be othered mainly occurred among some White-Anglo students whose ethnic identity was mostly taken-for-granted. Drawing on Hussain and Bagguley (2015), their ethnic identity could be understood as autonomous cognitive reflexive ethnicity. It was autonomous because for these students, ethnic identity was taken-for-granted to the extent that they did not necessarily even feel the need to acknowledge that they have an ethnic identity. It was cognitive because in classroom discussions about ethnicity, they knew that they have an ethnic identity because the teachers told them they do, but it was not salient for them in their everyday interactions.

One of the key features of the exhibition that helped to unsettle these students' automated certainty of identity and belonging was the *Welcome* video because it placed them in a position where they began to feel 'othered'. *Welcome* is a video installation designed by Australian video artist Lynette Wallworth (refer to Figure 1). In order to enter the exhibition, the visitor walks down a dimly lit narrow corridor where all they can see is a video display of life-sized people projected onto the back wall. The video display is outlined with a doorframe to give the impression that the people in the video are either welcoming the visitor into their home or rejecting them. Each group of people included in the *Welcome* video are presented in both a negative light (e.g., unwelcoming body language) and a positive light (e.g., welcoming body language).

In interactive displays like the *Welcome* video, it can feel like the people in the video are reaching out beyond the screen, thus inviting the visitor to move from being a passive observer to an active participant. At first, the students were not quite sure what they were looking at and their initial reactions were of surprise and shock. As they settled into the experience and stood watching the video images, they were also simultaneously being watched under the direct gaze of the life-size people in the video. This surprising feeling of being 'othered' shifted the White-Anglo students' sense of self. The following describes how the *Welcome* video helped April, a White-Anglo student from Bayside, to move from an 'autonomous cognitive reflexive ethnicity' to one that was more 'meta-reflexive' (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015). Her experience of ethnicity in terms of 'autonomous cognitive reflexive ethnicity' characterises other White-Anglo students' experiences. While filming her video diary, April commented on her reactions to the images as they changed on the screen. She was surprised by an image of three men of different Asian backgrounds who were wearing black leather because they were smiling and displaying positive body language, suggesting she would have expected them to be unwelcoming or potentially dangerous. The image shifted to a group of schoolgirls who she described as, 'whispering and looking really unaccepting



Figure 1. Walking toward the *Welcome* video installation

Image: Still shot from Lynette Wallworth's *Welcome* video installation as part of the *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* exhibition at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Australia.

Source: Museum Victoria

of people coming into the country, like it just looks nasty' (April, Bayside Video Diary). She immediately connected this feeling of being excluded and taunted to what it might feel like to be someone 'of a different ethnicity, wanting to come into this country and this is the reaction that people are giving you'. There was a third image of a family with many small children, who she thought could be a foster family. Their wary and closed bodily expressions made her feel that they were scared of her. By being 'othered' as a person who others are suspicious of, she began to empathise with people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds who experience this in everyday life. Through this perspective-taking and empathy, she began to reflect on her own identity and subject-position. She explained:

Standing in this doorway . . . it just kind of puts it into perspective that the looks people give you can really make a difference. Like these people just looking at you make you feel guilty for just standing here and I'm not even an immigrant. I'm an Australian girl just watching this video and it even makes me feel guilty just standing here. (April, Bayside Video Diary)

In this video diary reflection, she recognises that, as a White Australian girl, if she can feel guilty for standing there as if she is intruding on other people's space, she suggests that it must be far worse for people who have migrated to Australia. In her use of the word immigrant, she implies that immigrant refers to racial and ethnic minorities in comparison to the implied whiteness of being Australian. However, at the same time, by experiencing a position where she is the one not being welcomed, her sense of

belonging is unsettled and she begins to reflect more on her racial and ethnic identity as an 'Australian girl' and the social normativity of that positioning. The certainty and normativity of her racial and ethnic identity as White and Anglo Australian positioned her ethnic identity as a 'dormant ethnic identity' (Pieterse, 2004), or an ethnic identity that is not realised because it is not experienced as relevant or recognised and marked as 'different' in everyday life. Through her experience at the exhibition, she was affected by the unfamiliar feeling of being 'othered' and through this affective experience, could engage in a meta-reflexive ethnic identity process (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015).

For White-Anglo students whose exhibition experience did not facilitate a deeper sense of their ethnic identity, it did, however, help them to reflect on reasons why they may feel they do not have an ethnic identity or a feeling of being 'cultureless' (Perry, 2001). In the following example, White-Anglo students at Woodlane first affirmed their ethnic identity as 'Australian' (read as White and Anglo) through 'communicative cognitive reflexivity' (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015). In this variation of reflexive ethnicity, 'communicative cognitive reflexivity' is achieved by temporarily drawing attention to a taken-for-granted ethnic identity and then seeking to affirm that identity with someone perceived to be from a similar background. Then, through the discussion about their exhibition experience, they became more 'meta-reflexive' (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015) about why their ethnic identity was taken-for-granted.

- Karen I guess it's hard because I've never like lived in another country. I've never experienced another culture so I don't know, if I were to go to another country, would I feel like I belong more to that country than I did in Australia.
- Beth I don't really know, I guess like how do you feel to be like acknowledged as an Australian, like especially because I've never left the country or like really experienced other cultures so deeply that you don't really know like anything else ... like you only know how you live like each day. It's not really like, 'oh I feel different because I know I'm Australian'.
- Karen Yeah you can't acknowledge what you don't understand. (Woodlane T2 Focus Group)

These students went deeper into the issue of reflexivity. They acknowledged that it was difficult to be reflexive if they did not have experiences where they were perceived as different or could feel what it is like to experience their own ethnic background as Anglo Australian as different from another ethnic background. They talked about this in terms of not 'really know[ing] like anything else' because they are so immersed in their own way of living. Because they come from a majority Anglo ethnic background, which is completely normalised in Australian society as the 'core culture' (Forrest & Dunn, 2006), and live in an area that is predominantly White and Anglo, they do not know what it means to 'feel different'.

Conversely, for students who could recognise themselves in people's stories, the emotional and bodily reaction to those stories brought up their own memories and experiences. In particular, stories of racism and bullying experiences conjured past experiences and negative feelings that students had encountered in their own lives. Tamati, a Maori student at Harford, said that the experience that most affected him in the exhibition was the tram simulation. The tram simulation includes a life-size

video screen of people riding a tram in Melbourne. It shows a racist incident between a man with darker skin of African background (as target) and a White-Anglo man (as perpetrator) and the reactions and actions/inactions of bystanders. Tamati said that watching it reminded him of racism he had experienced because of his skin colour. He explained, 'It was of a dark skinned person . . . no-one would sit by him because there was the colour of his skin and I've only picked that out because I've been through it myself and yeah just got to see what happens and the situations' (Tamati, Harford, Class B,<sup>4</sup> T2 Narrative Interview 2014). Tamati could readily identify with the target of racism in the video by reflecting on his experiences with racism in Australia. Through this interactive experience, Tamati felt a sense of heightened awareness of his own identity and engaged in 'meta-reflexivity' by relating it back to his own experience (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015). Earlier in the interview, he reflected that in New Zealand, he did not remember experiencing racism and reasoned that it was because he was mainly around other Maori in the neighbourhood where he lived. However, when he moved to Australia, he became more aware of his racial and ethnic 'otherness' through experiences of racism. The tram simulation caused him to reflect on his personal history and the differences between being Maori in New Zealand and being 'othered' in Australia.

The exhibition also encouraged 'a meta-reflexive attitude toward the aesthetics of culture' through reflections on ethnic identity (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015, p. 8). For example, material artefacts displayed in the exhibition that included stories about who they belonged to resonated with some students and caused them to consider reflexively what they mean for their own sense of ethnic identity. Cezmi and Fahim, two students from Turkish backgrounds, commented on the similarities between the Greek shadow puppets in the exhibition and the puppets they had in Turkey:

Another familiar sight, the shadow puppets. We had a lot of them in Turkey and growing up, we used to watch performances of the shadow puppets. Seeing that in the immigration museum it's a familiar sight, I love it. (Cezmi & Fahim, Hartville Video Diary)

The students enjoyed seeing reminders of their ethnic heritage reflected back to them in the exhibition. Seeing the Greek shadow puppets in the Immigration Museum connected them to memories they had in Turkey when they watched shadow puppet performances as children. Even though the shadow puppets were from Greece and not Turkey, the familiarity of the shadow puppets evoked past memories, thus connecting the present with the past and helping them to reflect on their Turkish identity.

The exhibition also included written prompts in each section to encourage student reflexivity. For example, in his video diary, Matai from Wellview talked about his Pacific Islander background<sup>5</sup> in response to a display about food. In the 'What We Eat' section, the main introductory panel asks, 'We are what we eat, or are we?' Matai filmed another panel that encourages the visitor to think about how food considered 'weird' in some places is also normal in other contexts. Matai reflected, 'We do eat kind of weird food I would say but you know, it's part of my culture. It's what I eat, it's really nice'. He continued to read the display, which talked about taking pride in your family's traditions. He added, 'You know 'cause I go to church I get taught how to make food and stuff so I'm always proud of what culture I'm in'. He then panned down to other images

about how people in different cultures prepare their food and reflected, 'We're actually not that different as you see, how they make the food it's pretty much how [we] make the food' (Matai, Wellview Video Diary). Throughout, the panels and stories of other people's food and family traditions sparked reflexive thinking about Matai's own sense of identity and associated family traditions. He acknowledges that others might think that what he eats is strange but then reflects on similarities between how his family prepares particular foods and how people from other ethnic backgrounds prepare the same thing. Although this may seem like a simple representation of 'multicultural difference', Matai's intercultural engagement through food supported a 'schema of perception' (Watkins & Noble, 2013) that enabled a sense of 'affinity' (Noble, 2011) with people from different cultural backgrounds who seemed to be preparing food in a similar way to Matai's family. Matai's experience was not simply a 'moralistic insistence upon the "appreciation" of difference'; rather, by practically engaging with alterity through food preparation, Matai could make connections across differences while also meta-reflexively (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015) examining his own ethnic background in a new light as different but 'not that different' (Matai, Wellview Video Diary).

Although students expressed pride in their ethnic background, the pressure to have an ethnicity, read as 'non-White' and 'non-Anglo' meant that students also had experiences when they were pigeonholed and defined by how they look or speak. In response to what identity and belonging means, Tuyen, an international student explained:

Because like I say like . . . I'm Vietnamese here but then identity isn't only about the ethnic, it's about like in [my] class here, my identity is a student but when I go home to . . . according to my little brother, I am the sister. (Tuyen, Kensington T2 Narrative Interview)

Tuyen reflected on how other people use her ethnic identity as the defining feature. By asserting that she is also a sister and student, she resists essentialising multicultural discourse that categorises people by static ethnic and cultural categories based on physical appearance and linguistic and cultural differences. Here, she is both meta-reflexive about her ethnic identity and is critical of how others define her based on a limited understanding of identity. While white and Anglo identities are normalised and allowed to include multiple individual characteristics such as personality, 'multicultural others' are fixed to their 'ethnic identity' as the key feature that defines the whole of their sense of self. By asserting other aspects of her identity, Tuyen resists this form of 'static and categorical multiculturalism' (Ang, 2011, p. 29) by drawing attention to the complexity of identity.

Overall, students explained that they could relate to the stories in the exhibition because they could either recognise their own experiences reflected in the other person's story, because it reminded them of previous experiences of other people they know or because it challenged a previous assumption they had about people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds and caused them to reflect on their own sense of self. For other students, especially for White-Anglo students, the exhibition helped them to reflect on the normativity of their ethnic identity in Australia.

### **Augmenting teaching practice about ethnic identity**

Despite already having ‘buy-in’ based on the exhibition’s connection to the curriculum, like the students, teachers who had not visited the exhibition before were surprised at the depth of interactive displays within the exhibition. They were also surprised at the number of diverse personal stories that were included in the displays. This is illustrated by Mandy’s reflection:

I was just assuming okay, there’s . . . going to have a few displays and we’ll be able to walk through but I was really pleasantly surprised as to how interactive the displays were and how thorough and diverse the actual stories and different sections were and the experience was really beneficial for the kids and even for myself it was an eye-opener too and I really enjoyed a lot of the yeah, the interactive displays, which made the experience that more enjoyable. And interesting. (Mandy, Kensington Teacher Interview)

Mandy described her experience of the exhibition as an ‘eye-opener’, which was facilitated by the interactive format that allowed the teachers and students to engage with the stories and other content directly. Rather than staying at a distance, they were in a sense, drawn into the stories. Helen, a teacher at Bayside, explained, ‘That sort of stuff makes it stick in their minds a little bit more . . . [due to the] hands-on element’ (Helen, Bayside Teacher Interview). From the teachers’ perspective, the exhibition’s interactive format, supported through audio-visual content as well as diverse personal stories, provided the students with a ‘hands-on’ experience that not only extended but also enriched what they were learning at school. For the teachers, this was the core value of the exhibition.

Back in the classroom, the teachers found that after visiting the exhibition with their students, they could revitalise topics about belonging and identity in ways that were more concrete and practical compared to their previous classroom discussions. Annette explained:

In the classroom if I say, ‘Okay, who are you? Tell me, you know, tell me about yourself. Tell me about your background, you know, where do you belong? Or tell me a little bit about the country where you’re from. What do you think about or what’s your first impressions of you know life in Australia or how have you been treated by people here?’ It’s just . . . it’s not a practical application. But with the exhibit we were able to apply it practically. (Annette, Wellview Teacher Interview)

It was the tangible connection between the students and the exhibition material, and the affective dimension that the space evoked that provided a deeper and more engaging connection to the concepts the students had learnt in the classroom.

Importantly, teachers explained that learning more and understanding more about the complexity of people’s experiences of identity and belonging helped them to feel more capable teaching about such issues to the students. As Lynette reflected:

I was probably confident before but I think it’s given more information that . . . I don’t know if it boosts the confidence but it certainly makes what you’re saying at least in your own head a lot more credible. (Lynette, Wellview Teacher interview)

This sense of increased professional capability was echoed by Mandy, a teacher at Kensington. Mandy had considerable teaching experience (over 10 years) and already felt fairly confident talking about identity and belonging. However, she said that going

to the exhibition provided a 'practical' side to teaching those concepts in a way that was less abstract. Overall, the teachers felt the exhibition visit catalysed their teaching practice, providing a stronger connection to the concepts they were learning in class by drawing on how these are experienced by actual people in everyday life. These findings are consistent with the 'benefits to both learners and teachers of research-rich continuing professional development (CPD)' (Cordingley, 2015, p. 236). Based on a systematic review of CPD (Cordingley, 2015), research-based opportunities for professional development have a greater impact if they provide specialist expertise that enhances existing knowledge through new approaches and support teachers to develop their teaching skills by focusing first on how their new knowledge and understanding can assist students' learning. The museum exhibition served as a form of CPD by enhancing teachers' understanding of sociological concepts and providing a more in-depth interpersonal understanding of cultural diversity and racism.

Although the museum provided the opportunity for students to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings about identity and belonging and professional development that helped the teachers to enliven their understanding of these issues, the class-based assessments did not necessarily provide an opportunity to build on this experience. The need to integrate individual interventions such as the museum exhibition into the curriculum and broader school policy and practice supports research on using educational approaches to facilitate long-term changes in attitudes toward ethnic diversity (Zirkel, 2008; Walton *et al.*, 2013). Although teachers in this study expressed they felt more capable talking about topics in the curriculum due to the concrete examples provided in the exhibition, this also did not always translate to critically challenging assumptions about ethnic identity in Australia. For example, students at Bayside and Woodlane, two schools consisting of mainly White-Anglo students, had to complete a research project on ethnicity and were told they had to research an ethnic background different from their own. This reinforces the view that ethnicity is something that 'other' 'non-White' and 'non-Anglo' people have (Dyer, 1997; Hage, 1998; Frankenberg, 2001). Therefore, in addition to curriculum and whole school support, teacher training to have a critical understanding of ethnicity and opportunities to reflect deeply on how their views are informed by their social positioning, including privilege, is required (Sleeter, 2001; Picower, 2009; Kowal *et al.*, 2013).

## Conclusion

Drawing on the concept of reflexive ethnicity, this paper expands on previous theoretical research about the capacity for museums to engage visitors and their past experiences in a way that evokes an empathetic connection with other people's stories around complex social issues such as identity, belonging and racism (Witcomb, 2013; Schorch, 2015). The research reported in this paper also provides an additional empirical basis for theoretical work on reflexive ethnicity by extending it to the context of museum-based learning among young people. Overall, our findings demonstrate that the museum's immersive and affective atmosphere provided a space that enabled students to think reflexively about their own sense of identity and belonging through interpersonal encounters with ethnic and cultural difference. Rather than being solely a cognitive act, reflexivity was enabled through a felt connection with the

personal stories in the exhibition. This occurred as students became aware of themselves through the experience of viewing self as 'other' or through seeing themselves in or empathising with the 'other'. This reflects a trend in cutting-edge museological practice in which previously unexamined connections involving the self and others are challenged through emotionally intensive exhibitions (Witcomb, 2015). As Eriksen (2010, p. 42) argues, 'ethnicity is a product of contact and not of isolation'. Ethnic identity emerges through social relations and interpersonal interactions rather than as simply an independent and individualised matter of 'ethnic choice' (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015, p. 1). The museum exhibition simulated an immersive situation where students could have interpersonal encounters with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Through these encounters, the exhibition also included prompts in each section that encouraged students to reflect on their own sense of identity and belonging. This focus is reflected through the provocative question and exhibition slogan, 'I belong, do you?'

As our research findings demonstrate, the students' reflexive positioning was not simply a cognitive act but, at times, became 'meta-reflexive' through both hermeneutic and aesthetic modes (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015). For example, this occurred through a sudden and acute bodily awareness of one's positionality, such as when one's racial identity is felt as salient during experiences of direct or vicarious racism or when becoming aware of racial privilege (Kowal *et al.*, 2013). For students from ethnic-minority backgrounds, who were often already reflexive about their ethnic identity, their experiences in the exhibition strengthened their sense of identity by mirroring stories from their own lives in terms of cultural practices and issues of belonging due to racism. Their encounters with people with similar experiences enabled a 'meta-reflexive' approach to ethnicity, which contributed to meaning-making processes around the significance of their ethnic identity (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015). In contrast, the exhibition unsettled White students who had very little contact with people from different racial, ethnic or cultural backgrounds and who had never questioned whether or not they belong in Australia. White-Anglo students in this study tended to take an 'autonomous cognitive reflexive' approach to ethnic identity (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015), in which their 'dormant identity' (Pieterse, 2004) as 'Australian' was taken for granted. It was through their engagement with the exhibition and expressed later during focus groups and narrative interviews that they began to reflect on their ethnic identity through 'communicative cognitive reflexivity' (Hussain & Bagguley, 2015). Rather than simply a once-off visit to a museum exhibition, this kind of deep reflexivity, through which students consider their own identity and belonging in Australia rather than taking it for granted, is a crucial step toward dismantling 'othering' approaches and building a more just society (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014).

Another significant finding relates to the potential for museum-based learning to provide a refreshed approach to teaching topics about identity and belonging (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). The contrast between the students' and teachers' reported experiences in the classroom and of the exhibition demonstrates a significant gap in the curriculum. The value of the exhibition as expressed by the students and teachers clearly shows that a more in-depth, affective and self-reflective understanding of ethnicity is required. Traditional forms of education need to be augmented by creative aesthetic modes that engage and activate the affective dimension of teaching and



learning among students and teachers alike. This can include community-based learning and cross-cultural immersion programs (Sleeter, 2001) as long as they are implemented in relation to broader school change and ongoing professional development (Cordingley, 2015). Such positive and open approaches can orient educational experiences towards social and cultural learning while mitigating against a persistent neoliberal obsession with measurable literacy outcomes and numeracy attainments (Kamp & Mansouri, 2010).

Finally, in relation to the study limitations, our research methods did not include scope to explore students' engagement with ethnic identity at school or in relation to their inter-ethnic encounters in the broader community. Further observational research is needed to gain a better and more in-depth understanding of the extent to which museum-based learning impacts on student learning and teaching practice at school and how this connects to everyday experiences of ethnic and cultural diversity in local contexts.

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### NOTES

1. The six teachers include two from VCE sociology, two from VCE English/EAL and two from VCAL.
2. 'Race' is a socially constructed category associated with essentialised difference based on physical appearance, ancestry/inheritance and/or culture (Paradies, 2006).
3. The audio handset looked like a telephone, which provided a more familiar sense of everyday connection to the person talking about their experiences.
4. There were two different Year 12 classes at Harford College that participated in the evaluation. Class B refers to the second class that participated in 2014. Class A refers to the first class that participated in 2013.
5. For purposes of anonymity, the exact country is not identified.

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