

ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
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CONTEXT

My class was a combined Year 11/12 German class made up of 10 students. Most students were taught German from Year 7 onwards. Three students were Year 12 students. One student was an exchange student from Germany who joined the class during Term Two.

All Australian students had been instructed in German by me since I took over the class in May 2006. Three girls were boarders and came from the country. One Year 12 girl was from South Africa and migrated to Australia seven years ago.

One girl was from a Serbian background. Her grandparents migrated after WW II to Australia. Another was of Polish and Hungarian ethnic background. Six of these students hosted a German exchange student each at the beginning of this year (2007) for eight weeks and will go on exchange to Germany at the end of 2007.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

Kitchen Table Talks: Cultural Narratives

history > family stories > cultural identity > personal identity

Identity formation and kitchen table talk

I was interested in investigating the interaction of cultural narratives with the formation of students' identities from a macro and micro perspective. The investigation explored how deeply students are able to explore the interconnectedness of family narratives and historical events within their own cultural heritage and language; and cultural heritage of their target language, namely German. How do family narratives influence personal identity? Moreover, how do historical events impact on family narratives and personal cultural practices? I based this investigation on the topic of identity and German literature. The entry to the investigation was the reading of a short story: '*Das Brot*' written by famous German post war author Wolfgang Borchert.

Why did I choose this area of investigation?

I was keen to explore how to best allow students to understand the following:

- That the place and time one is born into this world, particularly the family history and cultural practices one is born into, will inform one's own concept and formation of identity.
- That making meaning of one's place and position in a society and cultural group is partially influenced by the stories we listen to. These narratives usually pop up at the kitchen or dinner table during family gatherings such as weddings, funerals and other cultural functions.
- Behaviours and cultural practices frequently resemble coping mechanisms. Hence they arise from the interaction of individuals with historical and personal events.
- Cultural practices are fluid and diverse, particularly in countries such as Germany and Australia where there is a long standing and ongoing history of migration from diverse cultural and social groups from different countries. There are many aspects to this dynamic that are narratives of reciprocal influence, adaptation, assimilation and the reinvention of cultural practices and identity.
- Cultural practices of various peoples are informed by historical events that have influenced individuals and families who came from all over the world at varying points in time and history. Therefore Australia and Australian society as much as Germany and German society are intimately linked with the cultural narratives of other countries and cultures.
- There is no homogenous cultural identity, in either Australia or Germany. Many subcultures and variations of family narratives spring from the matrix and tapestry of historical events and movements of individuals and people.

I was also interested in the ability of the students to explore shameful events in national histories and the impact of such shameful events on their sense of belonging to that nation. Moreover, I was interested in the impact the shameful narrative has on their positioning in regards to those events; and on the impact the shameful narrative has on the students' positioning in relation to the generations before them. Additionally, I was keen to see whether it is possible for students to comprehend the sensitivity of those events, in both their own and the target language's culture.

The investigation was designed so that it was non directive and open to the students as to what they would identify as a 'shameful' issue in contemporary Australia. It was likewise left to the students to determine what they identified as a sensitive issue in their personal family narratives and how they might view this in its effect on their selfhood.

It was of interest to see whether the students comprehended that Australians are mainly an immigrant population of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with the exception of Aborigines. Hence students' parents and grandparents might not be removed from specific German or other European cultural and historical backgrounds as they might have lived in Europe. They may have been affected by the history of the Great Wars, as victims, perpetrators or silent witnesses. Some family narratives may come from backgrounds which are not related to Europe at all.

What aspect of intercultural language and learning was included?

The initial focus was naming and exploring the formation of one's understanding of family stories and their context of origin in relation to the time and place in which they are embedded, plus the influence of those stories on the identity formation of students. The aim was to explore students' own linguistic and cultural identity, and to investigate how identity is formed and by what identity is informed.

Kitchen table narratives are about the formation of cultural knowledge and its transformation from generation to generation. The intergenerational aspect plays a part in how kitchen table talks are translated and passed on to the next generation. Another aspect of kitchen table narratives is how this information and knowledge transfer can be disrupted.

How did this translate into curriculum planning?

This unit fitted very well into our topic of identity and it took only two lessons to do this investigation. It is noteworthy that the experience of these two lessons will allow for a rewriting of the topic on identity with many interesting and stimulating ideas flowing on from the students' responses.

What changes were made to regular practice?

I put an even stronger emphasis than usual on ensuring that students were putting themselves in the shoes of cultural carriers of the target language. We then did the 'back flip' to reflect on how our experiences of the target culture are present in our own cultural context. I wanted students to see to what degree this occurred for each of them on a personal basis.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE**Setting the context: *Das Brot* – a German short story**

Borchert's short story, 'Das Brot', was given as a reading text and students undertook a text analysis. The text relates to the odd behaviour of an elderly man who is caught at night by his wife in the kitchen. The man was slicing bread as he cannot cope with his hunger. Caught by his wife, he and she are not able to talk about this situation. Both pretend that a rain pipe is clattering in the wind and that this particular noise woke each of them and caused them to go to the kitchen.

The subtext has many layers but is mainly about the woman allowing her husband to save face, protect his dignity and subsequently save her relationship with him. She understands his despair and, without commenting on the events in the kitchen or ever referring to it explicitly, she takes action. To ensure that her husband does not go hungry she sacrifices a slice of bread from her ration at the dinner table the next day. Therefore he will not need to get up at night and 'steal' bread. She pretends that she cannot digest her whole ration of bread at dinner time and introduces the habit that he will have one extra slice of bread each night for dinner from then onwards.

During the text analysis the class discovered that this short story was set in post-war Germany and that it conveyed realistic events that easily could have taken place. The odd behaviour of the couple instigated a discussion about the woman's action and the reasons for it. It also brought about a sharing of stories in relation to odd behaviours of grandparents and parents around food. From there on students lead the ensuing discussion.

Were there modifications in content, tasks, and teaching?

I frequently use different texts and thus there was no modification as such in introducing this particular short story. This unit of work stood out as a monolithic two hour (documented) block in the year program, due to the participation in this research project, and was placed at the end of the unit on identity.

It was different, therefore, from the rest of the programme, as it was included after the annual program was mapped and submitted for approval at the beginning of the year. Usually teaching units are longer and would allow for a follow on of emerging topics and their exploration. The exploration of topics emerging in the double lesson was not possible despite the richness of topics that emerged, such as forgiveness, migration, immigration, shame, dignity, interconnectedness, history, cultural carriers and the construction of culture and its deconstruction.

How did the class react?

All students were immediately engaged, interested, made insightful comments during the lesson and were deeply involved. Even weeks later, when we reflected on the whole year program, students commented on this particular double lesson and their reflection in regards to their personal heritage.

What was different from the usual approach?

I did not prepare the scaffolding for the Year 11 class in terms of vocabulary and allowed them to write their homework in English, whereas the Year 12 class had to write their reflection in German as usual. I also did not write up the questions before the lessons, because I wanted it to be a student directed discussion and therefore did not know ahead of the lesson what would emerge during the lesson.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

What data were gathered from the students?

I asked the students to discuss the following as homework in relation to our double lesson and class room discussion.

- a) Reflect on your situation/position in relation to your personal heritage -family history- in the context of history.
- b) Your perception of the position/situation of a German in relation to German history.
- c) Your perception of the treatment of Australian Aborigines.
- d) Your thoughts on Australian heritage and identity.

Questions for the German exchange student:

- a) What family narratives do you think influenced your sense of self?
- b) Do you feel shame or guilt that you are a German in relation to WWII events and especially regarding the attempted eradication of Jewish people during the Holocaust?

I also made notes on personal observations after the double lesson, and collected students' written reflections on the above.

FINDINGS

Realisations

I realised that this double lesson would be the perfect entry to a student-led teaching program. The class discussion and depth of investigation during this particular lesson permitted the use of the lesson's outcomes as a hub for many emerging topics with intercultural relevance. The texts created and the discussion points brought forward by students permitted a student-guided exploration of many other intercultural relevant concepts and topics such as fluidity of culture, construction of culture, destruction of cultures, shame, forgiveness, migration, immigration, literacy, social distance, intergenerational aspects, assimilation, adaptation, disempowerment, dislocation, cultural carriers, loss of culture, interconnections and symbolic acts.

I discovered that I did not need to direct the discussion and it was easy to allow for a student-directed flow of ideas and topics. The flip back in the discussion from one cultural context to the other cultural context is a most powerful tool to encourage intercultural awareness. An example of this was moving from the target language related discussion on cultural historical shame, to considering similarities in the cultural context we identify in Australia. Additionally, the process of reflecting back fosters student

comprehension that people in either of the two cultures are to a degree like leaves in the stream of historical events and are both coping as best they can.

The context of the particular class environment and language competence of this class supported the outcome of this investigation. Additionally, the presence of the German exchange student and the fact that all students had been sharing their learning environment with German exchange students earlier in the year, allowed fruitful intercultural immersion of the students. It also allowed for immediate input from the cultural carrier of the target language, thus offering an immediacy and richness of cultural exposure for each student from either the German or Australian perspective.

My own cultural German background allowed for immediacy and was of benefit in regards to intergenerational questions and positioning; highlighting the aspect of diverse and differing generational absorption of historical events.

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

Analysis of students' reflections

I analysed emerging themes from the students' reflections on each distinct point and was impressed with the students' depth of thoughts and insights and the topics that emerged. Many family narratives were instantly shared.

This started an enquiry into the causes and reasons for such behaviours and a link was established between such odd behaviours and experiences that triggered behavioural patterns for life. Historically induced personal experiences and coping mechanisms were identified as triggers. Events and experiences such as the Great Depression, imprisonment during War, forced migration, and financial hardship due to unemployment, high interest rates, alcoholism, gambling and ongoing drought conditions were identified as possible reasons for people lacking food at some stage during their lives.

Odd behaviours mentioned around food included being unable to waste food even if it is off, getting angry if people do not finish all the food on their plates and hoarding enormous amounts of food supplies. Neurotic behaviour where a person would not leave the house without a briefcase full of sandwiches was also referred to. Other behaviours discussed included cooking practices where a particular weekday is allocated to consume leftovers or where particular dishes are used to allow for the recycling of leftovers.

It was recognised that historical events are to be blamed for causing those habits. It was also acknowledged that war and forced migration, war experiences and war camp imprisonment were outside of the control of people and had to do with the time and place a person was born (a certain historical moment). The discussion went on to look at historical events at the time of WWII and ended with the question about guilt and shame of Germans regarding the Holocaust in Germany.

Our exchange student from Germany was asked how she felt about being a German in relation to the topic of shame about the Holocaust. As I had migrated only 14 years ago from Germany I also contributed my position and opinion on the subject in the discussion. Naturally students were curious to hear about the student's and my family's narratives in regards to WWII events.

It became clear that few distinct family narratives were shared about the dark side of WWII in the exchange student's or in my family. Instead, remarks and occasional hints served to shed light on the witnesses' experiences. It also became clear how emotions can communicate more at times than actual words. Silences, it was pointed out, have a particular bearing on kitchen table listeners.

Most Australian students with a grandparent who had served in a war also commented on the explicit silence around those topics in their family narratives. However, it was also said that one could deduce the emotional charge of those oppressed narratives by the upset expressed in relation to news about war zones, or the careless consumption and treatment of goods or the creation of waste. Sayings such as: 'waste not, want not' or the opposite of this motto, namely overindulgent gestures, were recognised as a reaction to hardship experienced by parents and grandparents.

At that point in the discussion the class looked at Australian history and explored whether there are also historical events that are deemed disgraceful and that may instil a sense of national guilt or shame. There was no guidance from the teacher in this regard and only topics raised by the students were discussed. The current war with Iraq emerged and issues reflecting the history of the Australian Indigenous peoples. The following topics emerged: saying sorry, the Stolen Generation, and questions in regard to the dislocation of people and the impending effects of the loss of cultural knowledge.

At the end of this lesson I created four guiding questions the students were to reflect on for homework. They were aimed at engaging deeper thinking about the students' own formation of personal identity in relation to their family narratives at the kitchen table and their positioning at this time and place of living in Australia. The questions invited students to reflect on their understanding of intergenerational relations and the different positions people occupy in the chronological flow of history. Students were given the opportunity to reflect on the class room discussion. They were invited to state their own personal opinion about their perceptions and views on Germans and their history, and on Australian heritage and the treatment of Australian Aborigines.

The German exchange student was invited to reflect on her positioning within the German chronological flow of history in regards to feelings of shame and guilt about the Holocaust. She was also invited to reflect on the influence of her family narratives on her current sense of self.

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

Examples of student responses

Your situation/position in relation to your personal heritage -family history- in the context of history

Telling her-story and positioning

Students were naming and exposing their awareness of their families' migration history. One student shared her Scottish heritage:

From memory, my family was free settlers in Australia, arriving in the early 1800s. A rather saucy tale bandied around our family every now and again suggests that our Australian roots took place because of a runaway marriage.

N (Y 12)

It became clear that the narratives about being Australian inevitably lead to the migration story of the family for all Australian students as there are no Indigenous students in my class. There was a clear distinction about coming from a lineage of convicts or free settlers. Some students voiced their stories with a certain pride about coming from a lineage of convicts or being fifth generation Australian. Students also realised that their grandparents or parents would in some instances have never met if they had not been refugees of WW II. Thus the impact of historical events beyond the control of their elders became

visible. One student reflected:

I would not exist without the event of WW II as my grandfather met my grandmother in Egypt. Both were refugees, my grandfather came from Poland and my grandmother was from Hungary.
V (Y 11)

Awareness of the link between family narratives and the formation of identity

Students expressed their explicit or implicit awareness of the impact the kitchen table narratives have on their personal positioning. V's comment reflects the trauma her family went through arriving in Australia and subsequently her positioning in Australia is informed by this story that she did not experience but heard about.

I seem to fall into the generation which is very lucky to live a safe, happy life in a wonderful country. V (Y 11)

A, on the other hand, is clearly aware that kitchen table narratives are directly influencing and informing her personality.

In my opinion the history of a family is important, and I believe everyone needs to know it. Whenever my grandpa or my grandma tell their stories about the War or their experiences of the War and its effects or about their migration I am interested and pay attention. I believe that those stories help form my personality.

A (Y 12)

Your perception of the position/situation of a German in relation to German history

Reflection about generational difference

During this investigation 'G', the German exchange student, was part of our class. She shared how she felt about the question of 'shame' regarding Germany's past. She voiced her personal opinion and shared the view of her family and her perception of their perception. Her current cultural identity is historically influenced and intergenerational.

Naturally I have a kind of a relation to National Socialism despite the fact that I have not experienced any of it in person...undoubtedly it was a horrible time. This impression stems from personal accounts of my grandparents and as well from history lessons I attended at my school.

Reflections of Australian students were astute as they pinpointed that there must exist an intergenerational conflict in Germany between those people who were living and actively involved during the Nazi regime and those who came later.

It seems nowadays that the situation of a German in relation to German history really depends on which generation they are from.
N (Y 12)

If I was a German in this day and age, I would feel proud of who I am...however, it would affect their grandparents or older relatives' pasts. Their pasts would (most probably) have changed their lives drastically with the war and devastation that would have occurred in their time. V (Y 11)

Realisation of shared history and cultural carriers

Some students understood or had the realisation that their own family history is interlinked with German history.

I think my grandparents would have experienced the same affects as their pasts are extremely similar (to those of the Germans). V (Y 11)

Understanding affects

Other students were able to empathise with the German people of the war generation and understood about this cultural reality and how it is still present in Germany.

They lived through utter terror and starvation, struggling to trust people...there were also many Germans who did terrible, racist things...this generation carries a substantial amount of guilt and fear with them.

N (Y 12)

Your position and perception regarding the treatment of Australian Aborigines

Australian Aborigines came up in the class discussion about shameful national topics and therefore students were invited to reflect upon their position towards the Indigenous community in Australia.

Distinction between self and perpetrators and existing social distance

Many students were aware that they do not really know any indigenous person personally and voiced that lack of first hand experience of any interaction with Aboriginal people. Hence they are conscious of the existing social distance between them and the indigenous communities. Many were familiar with the narrative of the 'Stolen Generation' and the surrounding contemporary debate about 'saying sorry'. They voiced their position clearly:

In my opinion the generation who was responsible for the Stolen Generation should apologise. I personally do not feel sorry as I have no connection to Aborigines. A (Y 12)

Thus although my family and I were not even in Australia at the time of this happening (stolen generation) I can see that it was wrong. J (Y 12)

Destruction through loss of cultural carriers and/or cultural environment

The comprehension that to be bereaved of one's family ties is the cause of suffering the loss of one's culture and that therefore that one's identity erodes is one of the deeper insights students voiced:

This caused many Aboriginal people to lose ties with their family members forever and ...destroyed the self-esteem and traditions for many of those people. N (Y 12)

Your thoughts on Australian heritage and identity

Cultural identity is multidimensional and intimately personal

It was fantastic that students were able to understand that culture is constructed from many different inputs. More so, it was excellent that students understood that one has choices in the formation of one's cultural identity:

The Australian identity is one which has been agonised over for many years. Many equate the Australian identity to 'Australian' items, such as Vegemite, a pie-floater, Cooper's beer, a meat pie and sauce, barbeques, Aussie Rules etc. Others relate being an Australian to the laid-back, easy-going nature typical of Australians. There are also many who identify being an Australian as having a multicultural mix of many nations and heritages, through our variations of food, music, festivals and clothing. There is also the vernacular that identifies one as an Australian, saying words such as 'mate' and 'crikey' often enough to make a foreigner cringe. I suppose in the end though, so long as you can hold your head high and proudly say 'I am Australian', it's really up to you what it means for you personally.

N (Y 12)

Most of our identity is what we accept.

V (Y 11)

The fluidity of cultural identity is captured brilliantly by those comments.

Multiculturalism

Students understand that the Australian identity is a whole combination of aspects and in particular that multiculturalism is very important:

...as we are all from different nations and backgrounds, and it is thus important to accept everyone for who they are, and respect their cultures.

J (Y 12)

Connection to the land

One student identifies that the actual relationship to the land and the location is a fundamental link to one's cultural identity:

To be Australian is to call this great land our home.

J (Y 12)

What family narratives do you think did influence your sense of self?

This and other questions were only given to the German exchange student in Year 11:

The current cultural identity is historically influenced and intergenerational

G voiced clearly how her generation and her personhood are affected by the historical events that took place years before her birth:

Naturally I have a kind of a relation to National Socialism despite the fact that I have not experienced any of it in person.

G (Y 11)

Undoubtedly it was a horrible time. This impression stems from personal accounts of my

grandparents and as well from history lessons I attended at my school.

G (Y 11)

Do you feel shame and guilt that you are a German in regards to WW II and especially on the subject of the eradication of Jewish people during the Holocaust?

G has a sophisticated view on the subject of the Nazi Regime due to her direct and explicit exposure within the German education system:

Rejection of personal shame and feelings of guilt

I do not feel personally responsible or guilty of that what was done to many innocent people. Furthermore I am not judging all people who lived in those days as guilty.

G (Y 11)

Differentiation between hard core and half hearted followers of the Nazis

It is impossible to place a general judgement on all people. In my opinion there were followers of the Nazi regime who were not convinced of their actions. This does not change anything in regards to their actual deeds but in my opinion it is important to separate those people from the others who were convinced they were doing the right thing.

G (Y 11)

Acknowledgement of the existence of the Neo Nazis

Even today there are people who believe that Hitler did the right thing.

G (Y 11)

Analysis of how Germans deal with this past and what it entails today

However, luckily the majority is through with this. By this I mean that people have not forgotten or suppressed those events but that they came to conclusions such as how important it is to ensure that something like that is never a possibility again.

G (Y 11)

The importance of the role of historical knowledge and education

It is important to me to be informed about these historical events so that it is possible to build a personal opinion. It is not my intention to minimise the deeds of the Nazi regime.

G (Y 11)

The importance of cultural carriers taking responsibility within cultural contexts

Moreover I am of the opinion that everyone ought to care that it cannot happen again and that there is a commonly shared awareness how many innocent lives were snuffed out for no reason at all.

G (Y 11)

References:

Borchert, W. (1949). Das Brot. In Van Horn, Vail and Kimberly Sparks (eds). Der Weg zum Lesen, 3rd ed., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986.

Scarino, A. & Crichton, J. A. (2007). *Why the intercultural matters to languages teaching and learning: an orientation to the ILTLP programme*, Discussion Paper 1, ILTLP professional learning materials, www.iltlp.unisa.edu.au.

EVALUATION

This unit of work allowed for many insights into how to apply intercultural language teaching. It highlighted how the process of eliciting greater intercultural awareness can be fostered and what must be part of this process.

In my opinion it is most important to allow students to immerse themselves in the cultural context of a topic that is relevant to them, either in the target language or their mother tongue. Thereafter it is vital to allow the students to explore how what they have learned applies to 'the other' cultural context. I like to call this technique a *flip back move*.

This was applied in the presented unit when students started looking at odd behaviours of their relatives in relation to food, or when the class explored if there were topics in the Australian historical context that might carry shame, embarrassment and are touchy to talk about.

I found the investigation helpful as it highlighted that it is easy to underestimate the critical thinking abilities students possess. I also enjoyed the fact that a highly regarded German literature text could be used in this investigation. It allowed for a maximum of language input combined with dissemination of knowledge of historically and culturally relevant facts and of insights about what constitutes the latter; e.g. that ordinary people and their everyday life experiences are culturally relevant, that culture is a living matter, that the destruction and annihilation of an ethnic group and their place may destroy the whole culture per se, etc.

This insight and many more are powerful as they build compassion and an understanding of what connects all people in whichever culture, namely the contextualised reality of human existence. Further, the conception that individuals must negotiate their own response to historical and personal events, that there are limits to individual freedom, and finally, that realities are constructed by a fabric of beliefs, behaviours and narratives and their interpretations are also powerful and empowering insights.

What emerged in this investigation fits perfectly some of the aims of intercultural language teaching as outlined by Scarino and Crichton (2007):

There is a focus on the lived reality of interaction among people. It is made obvious how culture informs the way people understand themselves and others.

As the teacher I inevitably mediate the knowledge and the contexts for use and application to my students and so does G with her contribution as a carrier of contemporary German culture. It should be noted that language is always subject to variable interpretation of participants in interaction, as the text, *Das Brot*, demonstrates so well.

Overall, the unit comprised language learning that not only lets students recognise the need to acquire new knowledge but also makes them participate in the community of users (teacher and G) of that knowledge. The findings clearly show that all learners, both Australians and Germans, are would-be interpreters. I am planning to use this investigation to rewrite the long term curriculum for Year 12 in 2008.

REFLECTION

The text used is part of the literature canon in Germany. Wolfgang Borchert is one of the most well known post-war German authors. His story offers rich language and a tapestry for an exquisite text

analysis. The text exposes students to understanding how German history has impacted on the habits of ordinary Germans, specifically eating habits. It allows the students to look at habits such as eating habits in their families and builds links to what they observe in their own families. The focus is on the underlying reasons for certain eating habits or attitudes to food in their own families.

Particular bizarre habits of family members could then easily be related to family narratives and historical events, such as experiences of the Great Depression, fleeing European countries during WWII and/or the Nazi regime, and the migration history of families to Australia at various times. Students examined where they acquired their knowledge about their family's histories and how those multifaceted family narratives impacted on their personal formation of identity.

In reflecting on cultural identity the class realised that a stereotypical cultural identity does not reflect the multifaceted reality of family and personal narratives. The understanding emerged that intercultural differences exist between the German speaking and Australian communities but only to a minor degree. Whatever culture humans might be born into they are exposed to family narratives that are intrinsically interconnected with historical events and thus history impacts on all individuals in whatever culture.

From a psychological point of view, students' ability to name and verbalise an understanding of what connects all humans in whichever culture they live is an invaluable insight. All humans are constantly in the process of negotiating their identity in interaction with the cultural and personal narratives surrounding them. The further insight that powerful realities imprint their effects upon people's behaviour and hence culture is valuable in building compassion. This insight encourages an understanding of the contextualised reality of human existence and the comprehension that it is up to the individual to negotiate her/his response to historical or personal events. This latter idea fosters the awareness of how history and cultural responses may affect the freedom of individuals.

Cultural meaning making is shown within its context as a system of beliefs, behaviours and narratives constructed by real experiences and their interpretation within individual lives.

This investigation also highlights the vulnerability of humans to the whim of historical circumstances and the effect of those on future generations. It initiates students into the thought that family histories, family cultures, cultural practices and cultural histories are all interlinked. Therefore the effect of stories and the importance of telling and creating narratives are also highlighted.

The Australian students realised how one's Australian identity was linked to the family narratives such as how long your family had lived in this country, where the family came from originally and whether their forbears were convicts or not. In a powerful way this unit of work made visible that the history of the places where parents, grandparents or the students themselves came from links their heritage and identity to places other than Australia. A family narrative of persecution allowed appreciation of being in Australia to be visible and clearly named. A mixture of pride and shame in family stories became evident including serious, quirky and funny elements. Many students remembered the excitement of listening to family narratives and could name how and what meaning they drew from those stories. Students clearly understood the influence of historical and personal family narratives on their own positioning and view of themselves.

There is evidence that students were able to come to the insight that what is perceived as otherness is actually the expression of different ways of coping with being human in different historical and cultural contexts. It was remarkable how many avenues of inquiry were opened up through these two lessons.