

## Global citizens/Local agents: Re-positioning the School at the Centre of Sociocultural Transformation

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### Introduction

As Australia enters the new millennium, the term globalisation has become increasingly familiar. We are continually urged in our workplaces and in the media to consider ourselves as part of a global community, but the meanings associated with this idea are far from clear. Theorists too appear divided on the issue. On the one hand Featherstone, Lash and Robinson (1995: 1) claim: '... the global begins to replace the nation-state as the framework for social life'. On the other hand the process is elsewhere described thus:

The process of globalisation seems to be accompanied by a rediscovery and revitalisation of the past and a pre-modern sense of community, of deeply emotional and atavistic patriotic feelings towards one's nation. (De Cillia et al. 1999: 170)

It remains to be seen whether or not a transformative move towards global citizenry will obliterate earlier loyalties to state, homeland and/or nation – or will such a transformation necessarily accommodate differences in geographical location and politics as part of the newly constructed global world?

For Australians the issue of globalisation adds a new dimension to the complex of concerns around questions of national identity. Since the arrival in 1996 of a new political party entitled 'One Nation', which embraced a narrowly xenophobic platform based on monocultural mythology, Australians have had cause to think about common values and visions for the future. This last year of the century has seen the defeat of the referendum on the Republic and the rejection of a rewritten Preamble to the Constitution. Prior to this the news media were dominated for many months by questions of the meaning of being Australian and the sort of governmental structure the country should have. This year has also seen increasing numbers of boatloads of refugees attempting to land on our shores. Consequently there has been wide coverage of issues of citizenship, refugee status and the rules whereby entry is permitted.

Yet another indication of growing concern at the way Australia is understood came through educational initiatives. As a consequence of a report which detailed the widespread public ignorance of Australian government structures and processes the government devoted considerable funds to a national curriculum package entitled *Discovering Democracy*. The package offers detailed curriculum for the school years from 4 through 10. It was released to every school in the country in November 1998. Concerns have been raised about these materials and the pedagogies they commend, not the least of which is the fact that they were not based on research into the existing understanding of young Australians (Gill and Reid, 1999; Howard and Gill, 2000). While some studies were undertaken into the level of school students' knowledge of civic arrangements (Print 1995; Doig et al. 1994), the affective dimension, the sense of belonging to a community and a country has been largely

untapped. The study described in this paper was carried out to address that gap in our knowledge of what young people think about 'being Australian'. We begin with a brief discussion of the question of national identity.

### **National Identity – A Discursive Construction**

By now Benedict Anderson's idea of the 'imagined community' has become something of a commonplace with regard to theorising people's felt sense of belonging to a place or a country (Anderson 1983). More recent work has taken up the idea of an envisioned community as providing a means of self identification and has offered further theories about the ways in which this envisioning might take place. As Barker sees it, for instance, national identity is '... a form of imaginative identification with that nation-state as expressed through symbols and discourses ... a construction assembled through symbols and rituals in relation to territorial and administrative categories' (Barker 1999: 64-65). Similarly Hall has described nations as 'systems of cultural representation' and extends the notion of citizen by explaining that people are not just citizens by law, they also participate in forming the idea of the nation as it is represented in their national culture – hence citizens are constitutive of the nation at the same time as being constituted as citizen by it (Hall 1994 cited in De Cillia et al. 1999). Viewed in this way nationality becomes a narrative, a story people tell about themselves in order to lend meaning to their social world, a story which transforms perceptions of the past and of the present.

A constant feature of the current theorising about national identities is that they are discursively constructed, amenable to change and re-writing, a feature in marked contrast with earlier notions of fixity and history-as-truth and essentialism of genetic endowment. Seen thus, national identities are not completely consistent, stable and immutable, they are fluid constructions, generated differently in different contexts. There is no such thing as the one and only national identity. The work of constructing national identities is seen as being carried out by national cultures, often couched in descriptions that approximate educational experience:

National cultures construct identities by creating meanings of 'the nation', with which we can identify: these are contained in stories that are told about the nation, in stories which link its present to its past and in the perceptions of it that are constructed (Hall 1994 cited in De Cillia 1999).

This perspective is strikingly similar to that of Shirley Grundy who writes from an educationalist position:

Thus what is presented in school lessons can be regarded as the 'official storylines of a society' ... in classroom discourse we would find portrayed modes of being that are given wide social approval. (Grundy 1994: 17)

At this point it seems appropriate to turn to the school in an effort to identify what storylines are currently circulating around the idea of 'being Australian'

### **The School as a Site for Creating the Nation?**

Formal schooling has long been connected with instilling values of patriotism, of loyalty, of national identity. For the first half of this century generations of young Australians dutifully recited the Oath of Loyalty during Monday morning assemblies throughout the land. Although such formal rituals have become less popular, the connection between schooling and national identification remains. In an interview in 1995, Edward Said commented:

Most systems of education today, I believe, are still nationalist, that is to say they promote the authority of the national identity in an idealised way and suggest that it is incapable of any criticism, that it is virtue incarnate. (Said 1995).

This perception of the close connection between schooling and the inculcation of nationalist sentiment was echoed by Willinsky (1999: 99): 'Fostering an allegiance to the nation lies so close to the heart of public schooling' - a claim that would appear to be based on an almost 'natural' order of things. Certainly educational sociology has long theorised the school's central function in the maintenance of the nation-state:

According to Bourdieu, it is to a large extent through its schools and education system that the state shapes those forms of perception, categorization, interpretation and memory that serve to determine the orchestration of the habitus which in turn are the constitutive basis for a kind of national commonsense. (De Cillia et al. 1999: 156)

And yet most of this theorising comes from the Northern Hemisphere and derives from locations in which the concept of nation and nationalism has been privileged rather more than in Australia. One Australian intellectual has commented that what was significantly Australian here was:

... the lack of nationalism of 'race and place', and a schooling in which Australia was not the be-all and end-all or even the focal point of our lives as lives of the mind. (Kamenka 1993: 27 cited in Stokes 1997)

In South Australian schools there is currently little of the obvious ritual such as flag raising or anthem singing that might contribute to a kind of 'national commonsense' such as Bourdieu describes, although there is a sense in which the very ritualised practice of schooling itself and the students' response to it may impact on the development of notions of collective identity in the students (Billig 1995; Grundy 1994; Gill and Howard forthcoming). Certainly given the current state of turbulence in Australia regarding the meaning of being Australian it would appear to be an appropriate moment to investigate the ways in which current schoolchildren understand themselves in terms of national identity.

### **Previous Investigations of Children and National Identity**

There have been few previous investigations of children's responses to questions of national identity and most of these have had as their subtext a concern with otherness, difference and the potential for racist attitudes being revealed (e.g. Carrington and Short 1995, 1998). A cross national comparison of self identification was carried out with German children and English children as participants and relied on the contrasting profiles generated by the children's responses in terms of self perception (Hengst 1997). The British children were revealed as more confident of being well received outside their own country than their German counterparts; whereas the children of Turkish guestworkers in Germany had a significantly lower estimation of their positive reception in places other than Turkey. In this study national identification emerged from the different profiles rather than being an explicit focus of the research.

Carrington and Short have carried out a series of studies in the UK which focus explicitly on children's sense of national identity, which they have shown to develop in complexity as the children grow older (Carrington and Short 1995, 1998). These researchers adopted a three part construct of national identity derived from Penrose (1993) which first relies on the existence of a distinctive group of people defined in terms of tangible characteristics such as

language or religion or other cultural practices; secondly the assumption that such groups occupy or lay claim to a distinctive territory or place and thirdly that a 'mystical bond' is forged between people and place to form an immutable whole: the nation. Among the more significant of their findings was that children across the studies appeared relatively uninterested in the question of 'being British' and that they only rarely encountered responses which carried a potentially racist overtone (the examples of which appeared to us as more like the registering of difference than racist *per se*). Although Carrington and Short describe their studies as 'ethnographic' their handling of the data would appear to be in the more straightforward question-and-answer style than that called for under discursive enquiry.

### **Approaches To Investigating National Identity Through Discursive Practices**

In her investigation of national affiliation in Northern Ireland, Stephanie Taylor wrote of the participants in the study doing 'discursive work' *against* the idea of a national identity (Taylor 1999). This finding was revealing on at least two levels. First it showed the necessity of the researcher avoiding a stance in which national identification is seen as a feature somehow inevitably interpellating the respondents towards identification with the nation; in Taylor's case the informants positioned themselves variously but personally and individually outside the 'national'. Secondly, and more importantly for the current study, Taylor reveals the power of the discursive position in which speech acts are seen not simply as revealing the 'true disposition' of the coherent subject speaker, but rather as the stimulus for viewing people in the process of achieving a position at that point in time (and necessarily one that may change at a later point). Certainly the informants used familiar speech patterns that would have been taken on unreflectively, but in their reproduction they also revealed themselves to be co-constructors of new ways of envisioning connectedness to entities both closer and more distant than the traditional nation-state (Taylor 1999).

Discourse analysis was also the method of enquiry taken up in a large Austrian study of the concept of national identity and once again it was the talk that happened rather than the answers to the questions which constituted the focus for analysis (De Cillia et al. 1999). Given the somewhat ephemeral nature of the concept of national identity it would seem particularly appropriate to adopt a similar position when investigating this concept with young people. The point is not so much *if* they identify as being Australian (or not as the case may be), but rather how they feel about doing so, what images they use, their language, their expressions, their inconsistencies etc. Only in this way can the research begin to reveal the ways in which 'the nation' operates as an imaginary construction for the participants. In the present study we have used an approach in which the children are drawn in to a discussion of 'Australianness', not in the sense of being questioned but rather we have observed and recorded their ongoing conversations which were instigated in response to the researchers' initial query. Our interest lies not so much in whether or not they admit to 'feeling Australian' but in how they talk about it. We see them as engaged in the discursive work of positioning themselves variously, both within and against, constructions of the national.

### **The Study**

The research being presented here is part of a larger, on-going qualitative study of Australian children's perceptions of public power and politics. Thus far, more than 60 girls and boys between 7 and 12 years of age have taken part in small group discussions about power and its use in the social contexts and institutions with which they are most familiar. We have reported on aspects of this research at some length elsewhere (Howard and Gill 2000).

In the groups of the oldest children (11 and 12 year olds), their talk about the articulation of power in the wider society inevitably raised issues of citizenship and this in turn led to the question of national identity. When these topics emerged in the children's discussions, the researchers used three probing questions to encourage the participants to explore their ideas. The first two of these were 'What is a citizen?' and 'What does it mean to say you're Australian?' The third probe asked the children to nominate some images or words that they would use in a collage designed to represent what being Australian means.

This paper, then, explores how 21 Anglo-Australian boys and girls from two separate schools in very different social class areas, respond to these questions of national identity and citizenship at a time in Australia's history when both issues are very much at the top of the national agenda.

The children's talk was audio-taped and subsequently transcribed for analysis using NUD•IST, the software tool for the management of qualitative data (QSR 1995). Where excerpts from the transcripts have been used for illustrative purposes in this paper, the children's names are pseudonyms and the number in brackets after a name is the child's age.

The main themes for the analysis were suggested by and, to a certain extent, adapted from the critical discourse analysis approach adopted by the large Austrian study of adult constructions of national identity (De Cillia, Reisigel and Wodak 1999). Here three interrelated dimensions were used to guide analysis of the data: (i) contents/topics (i.e. what was talked about), (ii) strategies (i.e. the ways in which the topics were addressed) and (iii) linguistic means and forms of realization (i.e. the use of specific language constructions to express meaning) (De Cillia, Reisigel and Wodak 1999: 157).

For the present study we collapsed the third category (linguistic means and forms of realization) into the second (strategies) - a move we felt was justified by the smaller corpus of data; the fact that the children's talk used far fewer of the sophisticated strategies used by the Austrian adult participants and because specific language constructions can be seen as a type of conscious/unconscious strategy used in addressing the topics being discussed.

### **Content**

The substance of the children's talk produced two major themes which will be explored below.

#### **(i) Symbols, Stereotypes and Icons**

The most common way in which the children responded to the question of what it means to be Australian was to list symbols, 'icons' or stereotypes that have come to signify Australia in the popular imagination both at home and abroad. They mentioned the Australian flag; animals such as kangaroos and koalas; Australian beers and football; gum trees; the Australian accent and idioms ('G'day mate'); desert and bush landscapes. They knew what stereotypes were and one group took great pleasure in describing a stereotype of an Australian male:

Int: What's a typical Australian like then?

Mark (12): I reckon it's like a guy who's got a check shirt that's all dirty.

Sharon (12): G'day mate.

Mark: All jeans, you know, the VB in one hand.

Sharon: Overalls.

Robert (11): And an Akubra hat.

Sharon: With the corks hanging down.

Mark: Yeah.

Int: O.K. So why is that a stereotype?

Sharon: Because most people aren't like that.

Important public buildings which have achieved iconic status were also mentioned by all groups. Despite the fact that the children are South Australian, the buildings that signify being Australian to them are all located on the east coast - the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Opera House, Sydney's Centrepont Tower, Canberra's Parliament House - an accurate reflection of the country's political power-base.

When the groups were asked to explain what they would include in a collage representing what it means to be Australian, a similar list of items, places and buildings was used.

Despite encouragement to reflect on whether being Australian makes a difference 'inside you', only Simon (12) offered a more complex explanation that seems at first to suggest an emotional attachment to country based on 'feelings'. However, his argument (supported by Caroline and Ailsa) seems finally to rely on specific political knowledge and recognition of nationalist symbols:

Int: So, talk a bit about what you think being Australian means.

Simon (12): I think Australia's - it's almost a state of mind. Like, even if you're, let's say you're American but you're born in Australia you still don't, I don't think you really feel Australian. You still feel as though you're American [...] It's what you think you are. If you think you're Australian, you're Australian. If you don't think you're Australian, you're not.

Int: So how would an American, say, or a French person think differently from an Australian person? What would their state of mind be like? Does being Australian make you different inside from other people?

Simon (12): It doesn't necessarily make you different as in personal actual feelings. I just think if you were American you'd feel American, you know? You may not know about all the

politics and stuff but you'd know that Bill Clinton's the President; there are 52 stars on the flag and stuff whereas, with us, we kind of know that John Howard is the Prime Minister - for the time being.

Caroline (11): Our leaders, we know who they are.

Ailsa (12): We know what our flag looks like you know.

Although Simon appears to be moving towards some expression of felt attachment here to one's country, his conclusion is nevertheless a cognitive one, that draws its power from political knowledge about the country.

## (ii) Everyday Life

A second way in which the participants explained what it means to be an Australian was to draw attention to shared aspects of everyday life often comparing these with what they knew about other countries. Clearly, to a certain extent there is overlap here with the *Comparisons* strategy that will be addressed below, however here we wish to focus on the content of these comparisons.

Language - particularly the Australian accent and idioms - was seen as an important factor in being Australian. Some of the children, like Leonie, had travelled overseas and they were intrigued to find that others consider Australians to have accents - for Leonie, this perhaps was her first experience of being 'other':

Leonie (12): I was in Holland for a few months two years ago and we were staying in a hotel before we moved into a house and we met a couple of American people and they said, 'You've got really strong accents' and it was kind of like, 'Pardon?' You know it just doesn't click that we've got strong accents. It's like we're a normal way and everyone else is different.

The standard of living in Australia was commented on by all groups as an important element of being Australian. Ailsa (12), for example, explained how '... we have a lot of things that other countries don't'. Amy (11) and David (11) in another group go some way to indicate what these things are:

Amy (11): In Australia there's a lot of open places where you can walk and lots of fresh air, animals and stuff like that.

Int: Mmhm.

David (11): No wars or fighting over things. No poverty - or most people have got money.

Explicit comparisons with other countries also produced a facet of being Australian that constitutes a stereotypical 'national characteristic'. Some of the children, who are studying Indonesian language and culture in school, referred to the way different attitudes to religion highlighted for them important aspects of being Australian - in this case a non-demonstrative, laid-back approach to religious affiliation:

Caroline (11): Most people over here would be either Christian or Catholic or nothing. But in Indonesia they virtually have got a lot of different religions that they're like really, really strong about their religion. But people here, they can be strong about it but just normal.

Ailsa (12): Like they [the Balinese] give up offerings every day.

Simon (12): They [Australians] can still have religion but they might not exactly be as faithful as some people in other countries may be.

Caroline (11): People might be Catholic but they don't exactly show it.

This notion of a relaxed attitude to matters that raise passions in others is also discussed in relation to demonstrations of nationalist sentiment.

Amy (11): There was this girl who came from America in my old school and she used to, every morning, everyone in the whole city used to go out the door and sing the American thing. And it was really funny because she was telling everyone at our school.

Int: Everyday at school in America they say "I pledge allegiance to the flag, to the United States of America...."

Amy: Yeah, that's right, that's right!

Int: "... and to the Republic..."

Amy: Yeah she was saying that in front of us and she had a really strange voice.

Int: Do you think something like that would work here at Melford?

All: No!

Simon and Ailsa in another group also raise a similar point in regard to expressions of American patriotism that they have observed:

Simon (12): It's like I was saying with the religion. It's more like a faith thing. They're very faithful to their country. Whereas we're faithful but we don't necessarily show it.

Ailsa (12): We don't overdo it.

### **Strategies**

The children used two major strategies for discussing what it means to be both Australian and a citizen. The first and most pervasive strategy was to negotiate and then to apply rules and definitions. The second was to draw comparisons between 'us' and 'others' and to tease out the differences.

#### **(i) Rules and Definitions**

The rules that were adduced to define being Australian and being a citizen often overlapped. Where the children were specifically talking about being Australian they frequently relied on questions of parentage and/or place of birth. As Sharon (12) says '...if your mother and father and all that are Australian, I think you consider yourself an Australian.' It's not that easy for Angela (11), however:

Angela (11): I got how I'm Australian from my mum and my sisters. It must have been ages ago - I can't remember when - it was heaps long ago. They were discussing that they were all English and Dad said that me and Dad were Australian.

Int: How come?

Angela: Because we were born here and they were born in England.

Int: Is that what makes you something - where you're born?

Rosie (11) Yes.

Tamara (12) relies on a kind of 'residence rule': 'I know my mum was born in England but I'm still Australian. It doesn't matter where my parents came from. I'm still Australian because I've lived here all my life.'

The 'residence rule' is also a key consideration when it comes to the question of what it means to be a citizen - most children agree that the right to be a citizen is achieved after a statutory period of residence in a country. The following discussion is typical:

Int: Okay, let's turn to the other question now about citizens. What is a citizen?

Simon (12): It's ... if you're living somewhere then you're a citizen. Sorry. Let me rephrase that. If you've been somewhere for a time...

we're Australian citizens but if you've just come over from let's say, Portugal - you've just come over from Portugal you have to achieve a citizenship to be able to become a citizen.

Caroline (11): So, like a citizen is from like what country you come from. Like what country you were brought up in.

Simon : Not so much that. It's what country you take residence in really. Well, where you've lived in for a while.

Ailsa (12): You have to stay there for like over 5 years or something.

Int: So there's a period of time that you have to be there?

Ailsa: Yes.

Throughout the transcripts there is a sense in the children's talk that a period of residence somehow demonstrates a prospective citizen's *bona fides* in relation to the country - it shows commitment, a desire to belong while simultaneously demonstrating belonging. A sufficient period of residency to qualify for citizenship though was hard to determine:

Int: How long then does it take to become a citizen?

David (11): A year.

Amy (11): I don't know. I reckon they should be there for about half a year or something.

Ben (12): It should be at least a week.

David: Well, I'm not really sure but whatever they've got is pretty fair because you don't want people just going there, then going to another place and then to another place and then to another place and so on.

Ben: And going around, "Yes, I'm a citizen of 40 different places".

While most children agreed that the 'residence rule' determined who could be a citizen, on two occasions the whole notion of this right to citizenship was disrupted. Leonie (12) and Rosie (11) were members of different discussion groups and both very clearly articulated a libertarian approach to citizenship. The discussion between Simon, Caroline and Ailsa cited above leads on to speculation about visas, passports and other forms of identification - Leonie then challenges what has gone before :

Simon (12): You have to have a visa to be able to get citizenship. You have to have a proper passport so they can map where you're from. You need proper identification.

Leonie (12): I don't think anyone should have to achieve being a citizen. If they live in the country, why can't they just be accepted as someone that lives there.

Int: So what does it mean then, being a citizen?

Leonie: It's being accepted in that - it's kind of like saying you're part of that country.

Ailsa (12): Yeah.

Leonie: I don't think you need to be part of - I don't think you need to be accepted to go somewhere.

In another group, the discussion also centres around visas for visitors and the right to remain in a country if you are a citizen. Rosie and Amy then radically challenge the whole notion of citizenship:

David (11): I think it's a good thing to be a citizen because if you're not a citizen of the country and you really like it, well then the government can make you move out.

Int: I see.

Rosie (11): I don't really think that's fair ... about the citizens. If you really like the place then I reckon you should be able to stay there.

Int: Just because you like it?

Rosie: Yeah, if you want to live there you should be able to live there.

Amy (11): Just like you can move to a house and buy it and live there.

Int: You think the world should work like that?

Amy and Rosie: Yes.

Rosie: I don't think there should be such things as citizens.

David: Like gypsies or something. Moving around.

Rosie: Different coloured people living in all different countries.

Being a citizen then for these girls should not be subject to rules and regulations but should be an entirely individual choice based on desire. People should be free to come and live in Australia if they wish, while Australians should be free to go and live wherever they choose in the world.

In general, though, rules and regulations regarding who could be a citizen were seen as necessary because of well-publicised problems associated with so-called 'illegal immigrants'. In all groups there was some discussion about this; in one group the problem was that these people could not be vetted for suitability and thus could have criminal records - this was the only occasion in the transcripts when people from another country (China) were referred to pejoratively. In another group, it was feared that the privileges of citizenship could be gained under false pretences:

David (11): Well, there's a lot of people from overseas and they've been saying on the news like, they come over here when they're pregnant and they stay here for a while and then have a kid and then they're able to be citizens because they're related.

All groups were well aware of the technical details regarding political rights and responsibilities of citizens - a citizen may vote for a government, work and own property:

Simon (12): You're allowed to vote.

Caroline (11): If you want to build a really big house, or just a little one, or get a good job at a big building, you have to have a citizenship.

and in return you needed to '... respect your country' (Ailsa 12) and '... respect the laws' (Leonie 12). Despite the force of Leonie's and Rosie's challenge to the notion of citizenship, the groups seemed to agree that it would be inappropriate for a non-citizen to have voting rights. As Ben (12) says: 'I don't know that it's a good idea that people who aren't citizens get to vote because they don't really know what they're doing.' Ailsa (12) echoes this: 'They don't belong to the country. And in a way it's sort of private, it doesn't concern them. It's like us voting for our own class monitors.'

## (ii) Comparisons

The second most frequently used strategy to identify what it means to be Australian consisted of comparing Australia with other countries. Many of these comparisons have already been discussed above and include different standards of living, different religions, different approaches to religious affiliation and expressions of national sentiment. The children were drawing these comparisons from actual experience or from what they know about other countries from the mass media and in most comparisons there was a sense of approval or preference for the Australian customs or circumstances.

A preference was not always expressed however. Some children talked about different ways of being brought up and different 'cultures':

Tamara (12): Being Australian is like how you were brought up. Like, there's ways Australian kids are brought up. And there's different things that Australia has from other countries.'

and

Robert (11): Yeah and also cultures are different. So if they're from another kind of culture, they consider us different in what we do. They just consider other countries different.

But it is acknowledged that you can be brought up differently and still be Australian if you consider Australia your 'natural home':

Ailsa (12): There are lots of different people in Australia, like the Aboriginal people and the white European people and yeah I agree, they all bring their children up in different ways. Like the Aboriginal children get brought up different to what we are.

Caroline (11): But they're still Australian.

Ailsa: Yeah, you might be different but you're still Australian.

Caroline: What I mean is your natural home is like in Australia.

Sometimes, a revealing comparison came as a surprise. David (11) explains he realized he was Australian from watching television: 'When I was young I was sort of watching the American TV shows and I suddenly thought I'm not like that, I'm Australian'. Another boy claims he hadn't thought about 'what he was' until he was asked by a school friend:

Ben (12): Johnno in our class, he's English and when I first met him he asked me what I was. I didn't know what he was talking about and I asked him what he was and he said he was English, and that was a bit of a surprise and I said 'Of course, I'm Australian!'

We asked if there were differences that arose simply from living in different regions of Australia and the children were very forthcoming about what defined them, as South Australians, in contrast with other Australian children. Language differences in idiom and accent between South Australia and the eastern states were singled out as being very important in this regard although as Ailsa points out below, these differences are really just superficial. The following discussion is typical:

Ailsa (12): Yeah. In Sydney they say things differently. Like we say 'pasty' [ long a] and they may say 'pasty' [short a].

Sam (12): They say, "Let's go down to the milk bar." and we say, "go down to the deli"

Caroline (11): And like, 'corner store'. They say, "We're just going to walk down to the corner store."

Ailsa: Yeah, words, but still it's pretty much the same, because same vegetation ...

Caroline: Oh yeah, I've got a friend who lives in Victoria and they call hockey 'minky'.

Simon: Minky? What a funny thing to call it.

### (iii) Linguistic Strategies

The method adopted by this study allowed the children to discuss questions of what it means to be both Australian and a citizen in small groups of same-age peers. As can be seen frequently in the transcript excerpts used above, the approach we have used reveals children discursively constructing their understanding about these issues - their choice of examples, the ways they chose to approach the questions, their inclusions and omissions were part of the group's negotiation and construction of meaning.

The actual language that the children used in their discussions was much simpler and less figurative than that used by De Cillia et al.'s adult participants. Unlike the Austrian adults, when talking about what it means to be Australian the children made no reference to defining historical moments; they used no constructs that began 'we Australians..'; there were no expressions of patriotic attachment. By contrast, at the time the data were gathered, there were daily expressions of the 'hand-on-heart', 'I-love-Australia', 'this-is-godzone-country' variety in the press and the electronic media from public figures and ordinary citizens who were making their contribution to public debate about whether Australia should become a Republic.

The closest the children seem to come to overt expressions of national attachment is phrased in terms of being respectful of or faithful to one's country -: '... you should want to be a citizen because that's like saying that you respect your country' and 'Being a citizen is showing you respect your country and you belong to that country'. Others might want to come to Australia because 'maybe they don't like their country, don't respect their country and they respect Australia'. Responsibilities of being a citizen include 'respecting your country' and 'respecting the laws'. Compared with some other countries '... we're faithful [to our country] but we don't necessarily show it.' The use of such restrained, dispassionate terms to express attachment to Australia by the children is in stark contrast to the more florid expressions of national sentiment that we have become used to from Australian adults in recent times.

## Conclusion

While we are conscious that the number of children taking part in this study is, at this stage of our research project, quite small, we believe that the findings are sufficiently interesting to warrant pursuing them as the study grows.

In terms of the substance of their responses to the question of what it means to be Australian, the children appear to adopt a fairly practical approach. They list things that are uniquely associated with Australia (animals, landscape, flag etc) - things that have come to be used in the wider culture to signify Australia in such things as advertisements, films, books, art and so forth.

A straightforward developmental explanation for the largely concrete set of associations the children produce is provided by Carrington and Short (1995: 236) who worked with similarly aged children:

It is a truism of developmental psychology that thinking proceeds from the concrete to the abstract. We were not surprised, therefore, to discover that while some of the responses to the question, "What makes a person British?" were abstract in nature, the majority were at the concrete level, focusing on such things as speaking English or being born in Britain.

A further explanation is that perhaps for children like Leonie (see p. 8 above), Ben and David (see P. 12/13 above) 'being Australian' is the unconsidered norm - a state best described from the outside and through comparisons with those who are different.

Like the British study which found that children were largely unconcerned about 'being British' (Carrington and Short 1995) perhaps, too, these Australian children are relatively unconcerned about 'being Australian'. Perhaps they are able to move easily back and forth between identifying themselves with a particular country while at the same time seeing themselves as global citizens - an identity they are increasingly encouraged to embrace through mass media, mass communications and The Internet. And so Amy and Rosie speak of moving freely between countries and others engage in discussion about Australian citizenship; some children can talk about a 'national character' stereotype while others can envision 'different coloured people living in all different countries'.

Attempts to get the children to reflect on more personal or affective responses to what it means to be Australian were largely unsuccessful. Their characterisation of Australians as laid-back and undemonstrative in relation to such things as religion and expressions of national sentiment, however, goes beyond their popular, concrete associations. The typification of the relaxed, laconic Australian is a widely-held and widely-mythologised stereotype and it is not surprising that the children reproduce it. As Hodge (1988) says, children's sense of national identity is very much inherited from their parents and indeed from the myths and stereotypes that circulate in the wider society. Along the same lines, the children's raising of regional differences and the fixation on the eastern states as being the place where everything of importance in Australia is to be found is a strongly-held form of paranoia among adult Australians from the centre, the north and the west of the country!

In relation to citizenship, the children are reasonably well-informed about the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen - a state that these respondents believe entails a respectful attitude towards one's country. Moreover, despite the three girls' spirited advocacy of free movement of all people between countries, there is general approval for rules to govern who can and cannot become a citizen. What is particularly encouraging is that, given the multicultural nature of Australian society and the numbers of visibly different groups that help

constitute it, at no time did these children question whether non-Anglo Australians should be eligible for citizenship - unless they were illegal immigrants.

We believe this study suggests that children may be beginning to adopt new forms of national identity - forms that involve an easy slippage between the global and the local, the national and the international. It is an important question that we intend to pursue with further groups of Australian children.

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