

# PEARL: A Reflective Story About Decolonising Pedagogy in Indigenous Australian Studies

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In this article, I take a creative and autoethnographic approach to reflect upon processes of decolonisation in Indigenous Australian studies classrooms. Positioning myself as a non-Indigenous educator, I take the reader on a journey through my search for pedagogy which makes space for the colonial, difficult and messy politics of race, whiteness and knowledge to be actively challenged, deconstructed and reimagined in this context as PEARL.

■ **Keywords:** PEARL, decolonisation, Indigenous Australian studies, autoethnography

## Scene 1: Something Lost and Something Found

Liz rustled around in depths of the hallway cupboard, desperately looking for something. ‘It’s here somewhere,’ she told herself. ‘It has to be — I don’t know where else I would have put it.’ Liz was looking for a journal, notes in a book with a pale pink cover that she had written while reading philosophical texts in a library far, far away. Liz began wildly pulling items out of the cupboard — shoeboxes of memories, paper folders holding records of a life once lived, envelopes of letters from friends and lovers — but the pale pink notebook remained elusive. Where had she put it? As Liz was thinking, a worn DVD cover caught her eye — it was the *60 Minutes* ‘Funny business’ footage. She used this video excerpt as a key element in her Indigenous Australian studies classroom at The University of Queensland and Liz could not understand how it had come to be shoved into the back of the cupboard. Featuring well-known Australian reporter Richard Carlton, ‘Funny business’ was an investigative piece of journalism aimed at revealing the lies that he, and indeed much of mainstream media, alleged Ngarrindjeri women from Kumarangk (Hindmarsh Island, South Australia) had told about the existence of secret women’s business on the island. In May 1994 an application was lodged by a group of Ngarrindjeri people under the Federal *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Act 1984* to prevent the desecration of Aboriginal Heritage sites on Kumarangk. The sites were named in this application as ‘women’s business’, that is, places of spiritual and cultural significance for Ngarrindjeri women. In May 1995 the South Australian

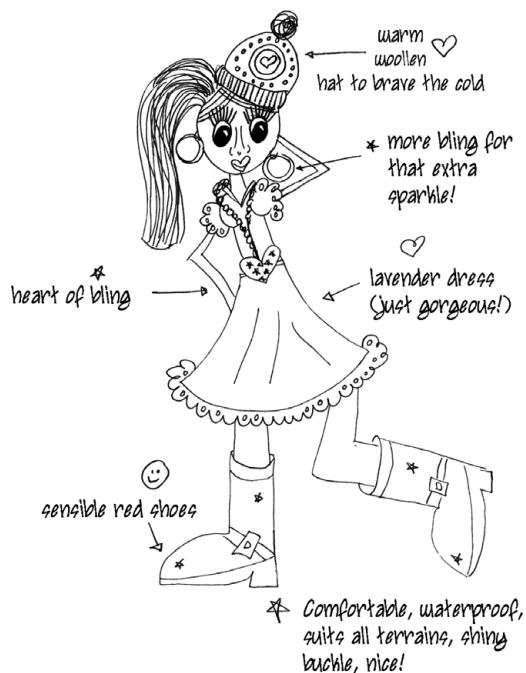
media carried reports that the secret women’s business was fabricated and a Royal Commission was subsequently held to inquire into the validity of these beliefs. Liz used the footage specifically to explore with her students the ways in Indigenous Australian peoples’ traditional, political, spiritual, economic, cultural gendered ontologies and epistemologies continue to be misinterpreted, disregarded, feared and silenced by the bias and arrogance of Western paradigms of power and authority. She would never forget the murmurs of shock and disbelief becoming cries of horror, anger and despair as her class watched and listened to the reporter scorn the very notion of Aboriginal women’s business and shamelessly deride the Ngarrindjeri who hold them. Each year it was the same. When the footage ended, the air hung heavily in the classroom. Tears would often fall and tissues were hastily grabbed from handbags as emotion overwhelmed them. Liz would then wait nervously for someone — anyone — to speak. But they never did, and it was in that moment of suspended thought that she began to hear a whispering in her heart which began with the word ‘decolonisation’.

## Scene 2: A Chance Meeting with Ms Autoethnography

Still searching in the cupboard, Liz remembered that she had drawn something on an A4 sheet of thick paper. A

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**FIGURE 1**

Ms Autoethnography (sketch by Mackinlay).

thick black line sketch depicting a young woman she had met one day a few years ago in the staff tea room (see Figure 1). Her name was Ms Autoethnography and she was the new girl in the department. Liz remembered that she could not stop staring at this mysterious stranger. Ms Autoethnography looked fabulous. Her clothes were the epitome of chic laced with a hint of craziness. Her dress was a subtle lavender number, which show-cased a blend of elegant and exploratory poetry, and was made complete by a plunging into deep water neckline. She wore a pair of red and racy chunky feminist playlet (Lather, 1991) shoes that grounded her attire firmly to everyday life. Her hat was carefully and lovingly woven with several identities and patterned with a number of email conversations aimed at braving and confronting the cold truths of positivist thinking. Liz remembered being almost mesmerised by the spectacular bling that Ms Autoethnography wore around her neck and on her fingers to emphasise in words that twinkle and sparkle of the ‘a-ha’ moment that often happens when we stop to wonder at our world, who we are in relation to it, and to each other.

‘Hello? Ms Autoethnography?’ The new girl looked up at Liz expectantly. ‘Hi!’ she answered with a big smile. ‘It’s Liz isn’t it? You can call me Aggie — it’s short for autoethnography in case you’re wondering.’ Liz did not know what to say and so she said the first thing that came into her head, ‘I love your name — it reminds me of a methodology I know really well.’ Liz knew she was gushing, but could not help herself. For some reason she sensed that she had met Aggie before (e.g., Mackinlay, 2009), perhaps in another paper or place, and immediately felt a sense

of familiarity with the new girl on the block. ‘I love your outfit too,’ Liz added. Aggie laughed, ‘My clothing? Well, I wear this kind of gear because it enables a scene to be set, a story to be told, intricate connections interwoven, experience and theory evoked, and then all of them ruthlessly let go (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 765).’ Liz looked at Aggie in admiration, wondering if she would ever be brave enough to emanate Aggie’s flair for fashion. Almost as if she had just read her thoughts, Aggie warned, ‘Be careful, Liz, this style is not to everyone’s taste. I deliberately place emphasis on reuniting the personal with the physical, emotional, mental, relational, social and cultural dimensions of everyday life in my outfit (Ellis, 2004, p. xix), but I am also constantly wary of the sometimes careless slippage into autobiographical pants which can happen when I stand in front of the mirror too long. It is easy to become self-obsessed and forget the central goal of what my clothing is attempting to do — that is, to observe the self-observing, so that I can come to a better understanding of the phenomena I began gazing at in the first place. It enables me to “step back” as Freire would say, so as to better “close in on it again” (1994, p. 108).’ Liz was not sure she understood but thought she should at least say thank you for the advice. ‘Thanks for the heads up Aggie. Where did you say you shop?’ Aggie paused. ‘Mostly I head down to the qualitative researcher’s bargain box — I like to mix up design elements from my name with clothing by critical race theory and storytelling. I like to think that by “naming my reality” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13) in what I wear, I can question “myths, assumptions and received wisdoms . . . by shifting the grounds of debate or presenting analysis in ways that turn dominant assumptions on their head” (Gillborn, 2008, p. 31). You’d be most welcome to join me one day if you’d like.’

As she sat in front of the cupboard with her memories and the drawing of Aggie, Liz remembered that they had then begun to make plans to go shopping together when the oddest thing happened. All of a sudden Aggie stopped speaking, grabbed Liz’s arm and looked furtively around, almost as though she was anticipating an intrusion on their conversation. ‘Liz, there’s something I must tell you,’ Aggie whispered. ‘It’s something important that you must know before we go shopping and try on this style of clothing.’ Liz’s eyes widened. ‘What? Why are you whispering like that, so secretive and mysterious all of a sudden?’ ‘Be quiet and listen!’ Her voice was low and raspy. ‘Can you promise me something? Cross your heart and hope to die?’ Liz nodded fervently — she liked her new friend. ‘What is it Aggie? Tell me!’ ‘Ssshhh! I can only take you shopping for my kind of clothes if you promise never ever to forget this — the ethical necessities of witnessing, response, dialogic connection, and complete commitment from your head down to your heart and then further to the process of decolonisation (see Bird Rose, 2004, p. 31). As an educator, I beg you, it is the only way and you must never stop looking for it. Please tell me you will never ever forget that

word — decolonisation'. Aggie finished speaking and looked at Liz intently, her eyes burning this message into her own. Her gaze was so intense Liz had to look away — plus she did not want Aggie to see how deep down she was wondering what planet she was from and how her words had frightened her. Aggie roughly pulled her chin back so that Liz had no option but to look directly into her face. 'Promise me Lizzie! Promise me you will never forget!' Liz nodded vigorously once more, but Aggie did not seem convinced. 'Make the sign! Go on! Do it!' 'Okay!' Liz snapped back at her. 'Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye! Happy?' The smile in Aggie's eyes told her she had done what she had asked. Aggie threw her arms tightly around Liz's neck and whispered softly, 'Thank you.' Not quite sure what had just happened and slightly embarrassed, Liz replied, 'If you're quite finished, do you think we can go shopping now?' Aggie's face lit up, 'Absolutely, I have a beautiful string of PEARLS (a reference to PEARL pedagogy mentioned in the paper by Mackinlay and Barney in this volume) I want to buy for you so that you will never forget me or our meeting today!'

### Scene 3: A Promise Remembered

Liz shook her head to bring herself back to the here and now. Her meeting with Aggie was not a memory she visited often, partly because she had lost the string of PEARLS the young woman had given her, but mostly because she was mortified by how quickly she had forgotten what her friend had asked of her. Liz could feel a slow but steady heat of shame creep across her face as she recalled the moment when she was forced to remember the one word she had promised to never forget. It happened in a lecture room while she was speaking to her first year class in Indigenous Australian studies. 'Indigenous Australian studies,' she heard herself state confidently, 'is a research practice which has, at its core, both strategy and social purpose.' Liz paused momentarily for dramatic effect. 'Historically, Indigenous Australian studies is closely linked with anthropology in Australia, and researchers from this discipline have long held a certain sense of authority over defining the category "Aboriginal". Anthropologists, and indeed, ethnomusicologists such as myself — typically study and research the diversity of Indigenous Australian peoples, histories, knowledges and cultures so that we can better understand what, who and why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are what they are. Contemporary anthropologists — some may even go so far as to call themselves applied anthropologists (Ervin, 2005; Hale, 2007) — also think deeply about the relationships we hold and enacting a reciprocity with the people we study (after Sheehy, 1992, p. 335).' She paused for a moment and to look at each student sitting in front of her, wondering what meaning they would take away from what she had just said. As her eyes wandered from face to face, Liz saw a hand go up in the back of the room. She had not seen this mature age

student in class before and immediately asked her name. 'My name's Nissy,' the stranger replied with a steady gaze and voice. Liz raised her eyebrow quizzically at the unfamiliar person. 'Don't you know who I am?' the stranger asked. 'I'm Professor of Decolonisation from the School of Social Science'.

Without warning, Liz's head dropped to her heart. She was struggling to breathe as the weight of memory rushed in to knock her over. Liz had not heard that word in — well, in over a decade — all those years ago when she had met Aggie in the tea room. Liz knew without a doubt that this moment was the precise moment that Aggie had asked her to watch out for, Professor Decolonisation was the person in the promise she made to Aggie — she's the one Liz had vowed to search for, to cross her heart and hope to die for, and she had forgotten all about her. 'Are you OK?' she heard Nissy ask, but Liz could not speak. Her forgetfulness silenced her, and Liz saw herself beginning to look more and more like colonial complicity. She saw that it was everywhere, in all that she had done, and she could not get away from it. Liz looked into Nissy's face and saw the faces of others — so many others who she had symbolically pushed aside, not only in the short diatribe she had just delivered to her students, but in many other contexts of white race and power privilege as well. In Nissy's face, Liz saw her husband's Yanyuwa and Garrwa family, Aboriginal women who had taken her as one of their own and nurtured her as a white woman, a mother to Aboriginal children and a researcher on the side (see Mackinlay, 2005, 2009). Liz heard their voices singing long and strong into the night, creating a harmony with the written words of Aboriginal female academics such as Jackie Huggins (1998), Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) and Marcia Langton (1997, 2003) who had similarly taught and guided Liz throughout her career.

Nissy's gaze became unbearable and Liz shook her head from side to side in a gesture of denial and erasure. 'It's me Liz! Decolonisation, you know the one you were meant to find?' Nissy searched Liz's face for signs of recognition but Liz was struggling — not so much with grasping who she was, but with the undeniable ethical responsibility she agreed to carry as soon as she entered into a relationship with Indigenous Australian people. Unaware of the nasty tone creeping into her voice, Liz then had the audacity to ask, 'Where did you come from Nissy? And what are you doing here in my classroom?' The room was so quiet now you could hear a penny drop. The students sat uncomfortably in their chairs, frightened to move a muscle, but intent on taking in every word. They sensed that race had been escaped from the cupboard at the back and a certain kind of theoretical, epistemological and philosophical war was being waged in front of them. Nissy stared at Liz in disbelief. 'After all this time, you don't recognise me?' Liz remembered, but said nothing. Nissy was quiet for some time before she spoke again and this time she was angry. 'I see you are no longer wearing the string of PEARLS around

your neck — do you mean to say that you've lost those *as well* as your memory? How convenient! I'm the one who works to expose people like you! Call me a bounty hunter if you like, no, actually don't do that, and then I'd be just as guilty as you. I name research like yours for what it is — a vehicle of sustained oppression, a tool of colonisation (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 14), a machine which continues to dominate our worlds as Indigenous and non-Indigenous people today.' 'But ...' Liz feebly tried to defend herself. 'No! I don't want to hear your excuses — don't you realise? Everything is in danger of colonising — everything is suspicious — this Problem-Based Learning jargon you keep pushing and even you! God! How many times have we as Indigenous people asked you to listen to us, to let us lead you and for you to let go of your power and privilege? I mean, when was the last time that you really 'looked at us' — your-self at me, the Other?' The only response Liz had was to stare blankly back at her. Nissy threw her hands in the air in disgust and turned to walk out of the room. Before she left, she had these parting words for the Liz, 'What use is it talking to you when you can't even hear the whispering in your own heart? Me and my Indigenous brothers and sisters — we're the unfinished business of decolonisation — that's right, decolonisation. Do you want me to spell out for you? De-col-on-is-ation.' Nissy reached for the door. 'Oh, and do me a favour — use your imagination and don't forget this time.' The door slammed shut and she was gone.

#### Scene 4: The Here and Now of Teaching and Learning Indigenous Australian Studies

Liz was brought back to the here and now by the tear that had begun to roll lazily down her cheek. Others soon followed. One to represent her lost PEARL necklace, another for lost friends, and still more for lost promises. 'How could I have been so foolish to lose my PEARLS?' she thought miserably. Liz was surprised by how quickly her sadness then turned to anger. 'I know how; I became so caught up in defending my right to represent Indigenous people because of *my own* experiences with Indigenous peoples that I conveniently sidestepped the whiteness of that power and privilege. I forgot that the experiences of Indigenous people *are not mine* and that we experience colonisation differently — me as a coloniser. I became too comfortable and fell into a deep complacency that soon led to carelessness. That's how I lost my PEARLS.' Liz thought that she of all people — someone who had worked and lived for 20 years with Indigenous people, who was now married to an Indigenous man and mother to their children — would never sink to those depths. In that moment, Liz felt as though she would never be able to climb out of the hole she had dug for herself. 'How could I have approached teaching and learning Indigenous Australian Studies from such an apolitical, naïve, and uncom-

plicated position? I *thought* that my way of teaching — that is, Problem-Based Learning — was a better way to teach Indigenous Australian Studies to begin with because it enabled dialogue in and around the difficult issues of colonisation and race. But for goodness sake, the very term 'Problem-Based Learning' is *problematic* in the context of Indigenous Australian Studies because it positions Indigenous people as a "problem" needing to be fixed!' The woman shook her head in despair. 'Now PBL seems almost like a form of "re-colonisation", if not a perpetuation of colonial ways of being, doing and knowing the Other. Why did I assume that the PBL pathway made such difficult knowledges, memories and experiences about the history of colonisation, violence and dispossession so easily "knowable"? How could I have forgotten a word like decolonisation? How could I?' Liz realised that it was actually quite easy for someone with her white skin, white identity, white power and white privilege to forget, and quietly kicked herself for allowing such slippage into a position of epistemological comfort. Being the pragmatic person that she was, Liz wanted to find a way to address the problems associated with problem-based learning and the colonial trappings of tertiary classrooms. She was not sure why, but she had a niggling feeling that her string of PEARLS held the salve for her discomfort — if only she could find them.

Liz sat back and made a list of the things she definitely understood about decolonisation in the hope of finding a clue to the whereabouts of her PEARLS. Number 1: The woman knew that as a concept, decolonisation takes on different meanings across different contexts — it simultaneously evokes a particular version of postcolonial political theory, a moral imperative for righting the wrongs of colonial domination, and an ethical stance in relation to social justice and human rights for Indigenous peoples enslaved and disempowered by imperialism. Number 2: Thinking about how she might define decolonisation, Liz was attracted to Fanon's assertion that decolonisation is not a formal administrative term, but rather a 'restructuring of subjects of history into agents of history' (Kohn & McBride, 2011, p. 69) whereby the colonised emerge from the fog of the colonial imaginary as liberated people. Wilson and Yellow Bird expand on this and state: 'Decolonisation is the intelligent, calculated and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies and lands' (2005, p. 2). Decolonising practice in research and education recognises and exposes the ways in which the underlying codes of imperialism and colonialism are both regulated and realised (Smith, 1999, p. 7) but does not accept the myth that colonial practices exist in the past. Rather, decolonisation acknowledges that it does not occur in a tidy and linear progression from imperialism through to colonisation, but happens in combination with them and once passed through can be revisited (Fox, 2004, p. 102; Poka, 2000, p. 159). Smith, Fanon, Wilson and

Yellow Bird, and others remind us that decolonisation is not passive — it relies upon and requires *praxis*, or as Freire explains, ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it’ (1970, p. 36).

Number 3: Reflection, action and transformation; three words, which the woman knew were integral to any decolonising act in her classroom. She had always felt that the Indigenous Australian studies courses she was teaching and researching attempted in various ways to enact a transformative educational agenda, that is, pedagogy which has the capacity to radically ‘change us and give us the vision and compassion and strength to work for both personal and social change’ (Morrell & O’Connor, 2002, p. xviii). The words ‘personal and social change’ evoke a pedagogy that Shor (1992, p. 15) describes as empowering education or ‘critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change’ whereby students learn to ‘critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibility for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live’ (Giroux, as cited in Shor, p. 16). The woman was convinced now more than ever that transformative education and the work of decolonising classrooms, curricula and the academy itself, have to be among the PEARLs hanging on her lost necklace.

Number 4: The woman was so taken with her own thoughts that she had forgotten to consider whether or not she should even enter into a dialogue about decolonisation. After all, she *was* white and perhaps she *was* using her participation in decolonising talk as a way to consciously demonstrate what might be seen at best as naive political correctness or at worst a further embedding colonial power and authority (Goff, 2010). Did she have a place in conversations about decolonisation or was this a right and responsibility that belonged to Indigenous people only? The woman was concerned now and surmised that maybe this is why she could not find her PEARLs. Fanon’s home truth that ‘You will never make colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little-known treasures under its eyes’ (1967, p. 180) came back to haunt her, and she began to think that she was never meant to have the PEARLs in the first place.

### Scene 5: A Dialogue Begins Despite Her

Liz became entangled in her worries and did not see the group walking towards her. One of them leant down and gently touched her shoulder. ‘Liz? Are you OK? What are you doing sitting on the floor in front of this old colonial style cupboard?’ She looked up and saw four people standing in front of her. Embodiment wore her best post-structuralist feminist dress, Dialogic stood casually beside wearing a t-shirt with ‘I love Bakhtin’ printed boldly across the front, and Ethical Necessity held hands tightly with Moral Imperatives. The woman smiled in recogni-

tion and then frowned slightly. ‘It’s lovely to see you all but what are you doing here?’ Embodiment spoke first. ‘We are here because we think you need us Liz — we’re the manifestation of the theories, ideas and new understandings that students have arrived at through the pedagogy of PEARL in your classrooms.’ Liz shook her head. ‘But you don’t understand, I’ve lost my PEARL necklace.’ Dialogic beamed at her and took his hands from behind his back. ‘That’s where you’re wrong Liz — we have them right here for you.’ He reached forward and gently placed the string of PEARLs in the woman’s lap. ‘And we even had them especially engraved for you so that you wouldn’t forget them again,’ added Ethical Necessity and Moral Imperative in unison. Liz turned each of the PEARLs over in her hand and gasped as she noticed the following inscriptions delicately etched on each one: P (for political, performative, process, place based), E (for embodied, experiential, explorative, engaged, emotion, empathy), A (for active, anti-racist, anti-colonial, active), R (for relational, reflective, reflexive), and L (for lifelong learning).

Before Liz could say anything, Embodiment spoke. ‘I came here today to remind you that reflection, action and transformation are central to decolonising pedagogical approaches in Indigenous Australian studies and given the emphasis on doing as a way of knowing and being, the links between decolonising practice and me (that is, embodied teaching and learning experiences) are strong. Remember Merleau-Ponty’s (1962, p. xvi–xvii) assertion that ‘The world is not what I think, but what I live through — it is through the body that we have access to the world and from which a body-subject derives unity, purpose and meaning from actively living and moving about in the world’. Dialogic nodded his head excitedly, ‘Yes, and the interaction alluded to by Merleau-Ponty in terms of “being in the world” opens up a space for dialogue and encounter with self and Other—between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples.’ He stopped speaking momentarily to take a breath. ‘And that’s where I come in. A Bakhtinian dialogic is also invoked whereby dialogue “creates the ground for understanding . . . prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding”, and where “understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition one each other; one is impossible without the other’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282). Dialogic finished speaking and looked at Liz. ‘Well, what do you think?’ She shook her head in response. ‘That all sounds great in theory Dialogic and Embodiment, but I’m not sure how it translates in real life — I mean, Smith tells us that true decolonisation changes lives and makes a difference to reality. Can you and your friends really make that happen and bring about change?’

Trying not to show their exasperation with her, Dialogic and Embodiment looked pointedly at Ethical Necessity and Moral Imperatives. It was time to bring in

the big guns. ‘Liz,’ began Ethical Necessity, ‘your students grapple with the past and present-ness of colonialism, and their subjectivity and complicity with the project of whiteness each and every time they step into your classroom. It’s a topic which brings difficult memory, trauma, guilt, shame and denial, and by necessity it becomes an ethical encounter of historical and contemporary human connectivity, as Levinas would put it, which engages relationships of responsibility.’ Liz is not sure where this is headed but before she has a chance to protest, Moral Imperatives pulls out a copy of an email they had received from students and lecturers last semester, which draw links between Indigenous Australian Studies, embodiment, and processes of transformation and decolonisation. ‘Here,’ says Moral Imperatives, ‘take a look at this’:

PEARLstudents pearls101@gmail.com

To: Embodiment, Dialogic, Ethical Necessity and Moral Imperatives edenami@hotmail.com

30 March 2012 11:48

Dear Embodiment, Dialogic, Ethical Necessity and Moral Imperatives,

How are you? We wanted to write to you to give you some feedback on what the students in your PEARL classroom think is happening in regards to processes of transformation and decolonisation.

In the PEARL classroom we are learning about people, culture and attempting to gain an experience.<sup>1</sup> It’s the experience that counts the most. The hands-on learning approach teaches us way more than sitting and listening to the lectures.<sup>2</sup> Actually experiencing, touching and smelling or imagining engages every part of us in the learning.<sup>2</sup> As teachers and learners, you have to delve into the problem and put your whole self in the situation. You’re picking things up, you’re interacting with other human beings, and you’re physically getting a little bit more involved than just a paper and a pen.<sup>4</sup> We remember heaps more too because we are experiencing what we learn.<sup>3</sup> The tactile nature of it makes it much more real and much more of a full body experience and a full emotional experience for students. Once we embody our learning, we also carry a responsibility to act and make changes in the world around us. PEARL makes that embodiment happen; once you embody your learning, you walk with that responsibility and then you do something about it.<sup>4</sup>

But it’s not just about us. The PEARL approach allows the lecturer and the class to move beyond the black and white print — beyond the black and white bodies — and engage with issues at a deep and sometimes very personal and challenging level.<sup>4</sup> In a PEARL classroom we can safely and sensitively explore Australia’s colonial history and contemporary relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

As non-Indigenous Australians, this area of study makes us feel very vulnerable but we feel that the safeness in PEARL pedagogy enables us to look at things where normally fear would have got in the way — this subject has the propensity to confront so we

need a safe space to respond.<sup>2</sup> We don’t have to be embarrassed or worry about seeming ignorant.<sup>3</sup>

Creating that space for a dialogue to happen is a way of voicing our uncertainties, discomforts and anxieties them rather than them being silent.<sup>3</sup>

The final thought we want to share is that PEARL pedagogy is the closest thing to real life<sup>4</sup> you can get. It’s a living way of learning and it’s to do with ‘being’.<sup>2</sup>

Yours truly,

<sup>1</sup> The University of Queensland students, <sup>2</sup> Monash students, <sup>3</sup> University of Newcastle students, and <sup>4</sup> Lecturers and tutors in the case studies for the PBL becomes PEARL project (see Mackinlay and Barney in this volume).

Liz was moved beyond words by the email and struggled to find the appropriate thing to say. ‘But wait!’ interrupted Embodiment, ‘there’s more!’ Sheepishly, Ethical Necessity bent down and placed a pale pink notebook in Liz’s lap. Liz gasped in delight and began to read her messy jottings. ‘The face of the other,’ she read, ‘calls the subject to responsibility . . . it does so in a way which that demands my attention to [her] call. [She] shows [her]self to me, and I cannot help but respond, because I cannot turn away’ (Levinas, as cited in Fryer, 2004, p. 42). ‘That’s it!’ Liz thought. ‘That’s exactly what I have been trying to make space for in our PEARL classroom. We want our students to be transformed through reflection to action. Through such literal, discursive and intercorporeal looking, the self and Other enter into a relationship with and a responsibility to one another — lives, histories, memories, stories, conversations, emotions and desires become entangled. It enables teachers and learners to understand that the violence of colonialism belongs to all of us — colonisers too. And the more we continue to act as though the suffering of Indigenous Australian people never mattered, the more we perpetuate colonial violence in the present.’

As she sat staring at her notebook, Liz wished desperately that her old friend Professor Decolonisation were here to talk to. She knew that Nissy brought the necessity of a moral engagement of the past into the present through situatedness, openness and dialogue. It may sound obvious but ‘openness is risky because one does not know the outcome . . . one’s own ground can become destabilised . . . one’s self [is] available to be surprised, to be challenged, and to be changed’ (Bird Rose, 2004, p. 22). The change Liz imagined was a place where decolonisation could be taken on board as a critical and vigilant way of thinking (hooks, 2010, p. 26) about the colonial past in the present. She did not want to be afraid to look into the dark corners of her colonised classroom and curriculum. Liz gently placed the PEARL necklace around her neck and with her mind firmly ‘stayed on freedom’ (hooks, 2010, p. 28) silently avowed to never lose it again.

## Scene 6: Playing Around with Words, Ideas and Possibilities

Liz woke up with a start. She had fallen asleep in front of the cupboard and half expected to find Embodiment, Dialogic, Ethical Necessity and Moral Imperatives sitting next to her. Of course they were nowhere to be seen and Liz sighed as she realised it had all been but a dream. It was then, and only then, that she noticed the pale pink notebook sitting in her lap. She squinted, rubbed her eyes, and instinctively felt her neck to see if she was still wearing the PEARLs. There was no denying it; both the necklace and the notebook were very real. The woman opened the pale pink cover of her journal, carefully at first, and watched entranced as the email letter which her friends had given her, fell onto the floor. Her cautiousness turned to haste as she quickly flipped the pages to the end. On the last page a poem had been scribbled there:

*Dear Liz, I wanted to write this poem for you to show you how much I enjoyed our shopping spree in the city today. We were like giddy schoolgirls singing and laughing our way into and through town! I hope you can remember how the tune of our journey together goes because I can't be there to help you — this is something you are going to have to perform on your own.*

*See, see my playmate/ Come out and play with me/  
And bring your morality/ Climb up my ethics tree/  
Holler down my colonised mores/ Slide down my Other's door/  
And we'll be in dialogue as friends/ Forever more  
Oh no my playmate/ I can't come play with you/  
My education is important too/ Who the hell do you think are you/  
Can't holler down my colonised mind/ Or criticise my pedagogical mores/  
But we'll monologic friends/ Forever more  
Say, say, my playmate/ Don't come and play with me/  
Unless you can clearly see/ Indigenous sovereignty/  
Fall off your pedestal/ Look into their face for sure/  
And we won't be enemies/ Forever more  
Say, say my playmate/ I would love to agree/  
To look at them and see/ Their alterity and our shared humanity/  
But I don't want to lose it all / My white power and privilege I adore/  
With you I'll have to disagree / Forever more  
Say say my playmate/ I can help you find the key/  
To PEARL pedagogy/ And an educational practice that's free/  
We'll sit on the decolonising shelf/ Have a dialogue between other and self/  
And keep an open door/ Forever more*

## Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my circle of critical friends in the School of Education at The University of Queensland for read-

ing and providing feedback on draft versions of this paper, in particular Greg Vass. I would also like to thank The University of Queensland, Monash University, University of Newcastle, Charles Darwin University and University of Technology students for their participation in the study upon which much of the thinking presented here is grounded. Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

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