Defining Diversity and its Relation to the Local and Global
A Question of Methodology

Ruth Arber

The first years of research ... were wonderfully exciting ... The picture that I was able to paint of the school and the individual experiences which were occurring within them were vibrant and glowing. It was full of exciting stories about the people I was meeting during my research. Why was the Chinese teacher having so much difficulty introducing a curriculum of Chinese studies within the school? Why was the ESL teacher at one school able to introduce a multicultural policy statement with so much ease and yet be so ineffectual in changing the actual activities of teachers within the school? Why was the new principal at a second school able to change the school curriculum so quickly without the benefit of such a statement? Most exciting of all, I was gathering the stories about the lives of individuals and their experiences within an ethnically diverse school system. What was it like to be a new principal in a school that was suffering from increasing ethnic division? What was it like for the student who had narrowly escaped through the jungles of Cambodia and had never had time for an education before? What was it like for the Greek teacher who felt torn between the aspirations of his parents' compatriots and the demands of his professional peers? I felt like a detective as I doggedly tracked down the clues ...

And then everything came to a stop ... The standstill came not because of the sheer immensity of the material although it was massive. In fact, the vast stores of data from which I could draw helped me to paint an ever-widening and more dynamic picture of what was happening within the schools. Rather, the problem was one of concept(ion). (Arber, 1993, p.1)

In 1988, I interwove the miscellany of narrations that brought to life a school community. Through the words of my informants, I placed together a mosaic of the day-to-day of school life. As the year progressed however, I became increasingly concerned that I could not properly explain my research material. The stories I collected seemed unpatterned, ad hoc and changing. They negotiated practices in ways that seemed idiosyncratic and inconsistent. They included frequent and noisy conversations about some matters while other matters were discussed only reluctantly. By the time I returned to the school a decade later it was clear that if I were to explain my data I would need to find a methodological frame which could allow me to deal with my data more adequately. My project examined the ways that race and ethnic relations are spoken about and how this has changed. In 1988, and again in 1998, I implemented nearly 30 open ended interviews with parents and teachers in one school in Melbourne, Australia and examined how they spoke about race and ethnic relations. The final dismantling of the White Australia Policy in the 1970's and increasing migration since World War II meant that the demography of Melbourne schools had changed considerably. By the end of the twentieth century schools were transformed by changes brought about by technological and global change. My task was to examine how teachers and parents
spoke about race and ethnic relations in two periods of immense demographic and
globalising change.

My research was complicated by three observations in particular. First, literatures
of globalisation and post colonialism suggested that race and ethnicity in schools need
be thought about differently as, in ‘new times’, the shaping context to which these
notions are tied, changed.\(^1\). They did not speak about how these altered ways of
understanding can be understood in relation to practices and experiences in a local
school. Second, my respondents found it difficult to speak about these relations,
particularly as they can be described as racism. Instead my respondents and I spoke at
length about policies and practices of multiculturalism. Finally, despite the reluctance
to speak about racism, my conversations with parents and teachers were focused on
the presence of another. This obsessive reluctance to speak of another became
increasingly complex, as in an increasingly globalised and post modern world,
definitions of essential identity, and therefore, distinctions between who-we-are and
who-they-are became increasingly difficult to make.

In order to carry out the research it was necessary to set out the dimensions of a
methodology that could be used for research into discussions about race and ethnicity
in an increasingly diverse and globalised local context. Beck’s (2000) notion is that
the interrelation between the global and the local is a paradoxial, ambivalent one
where commonly held notions of cultural difference and diversity become hopelessly
confused as they are understood as both ‘Multiplicity without unity’ and yet as a
never ending processes of unequally empowered interaction as:

In research associated with ‘cultural theory’ the linearity assumption and the Either-Or
of national axiomatics are replaced by Both-And postulates, globalisation,
regionalisation, linkage and fragmentalisation, centralisation and decentralisation, are
dynamics that belong together as two sides of the same coin (Beck, 2000, p.26).

Post colonial literatures point to the ever-changing, complex process of paradox
and ambivalence that underpins definitions about diversity. So often these definitions
assume a disjunction between sameness and difference critiqued in postcolonial
literatures whereby raced and ethnicised individuals are conceived of as being
bordered by essential and often-irreconcilable difference, even as all people are
understood as the same.\(^2\) What is ignored in so many of these definitions is that these
discussions are played out within a multi-layered complexity of unequally
empowered, dimensions of differentiation, which mediate the experiences of real
people. Crucially this terrain is one of ‘multiaxiality’ whereby definitions of culture
and race have real meaning, but are at the same time, contingent within a socio-
cultural context.\(^3\) What needs to be done is define a methodology that asks questions
about what it means to examine these ambivalent relationships in a multidimensional,
multipowered, increasingly changing. What are the dimensions of a methodology
which can define difference and the same, otherness and self at the same time; in a
local world transformed by ‘globalisation and regionalisation, centralisation and
decentralisation, linkage and fragmentation’? Moreover, what are the dimensions of a
comprehensive methodology that can examine these ambivalent relations and the
meaning they have for the particular experiences of the people who live them?

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\(^1\) See Hall (1996)
\(^2\) For examples of the mass of literature that considers culture, but separately from its context
see for instance Fantini (1997) For discussions which critique discourses of culturalism see
\(^3\) I particularly like Atvah Brah’s (1996) analysis here.
Contemporary methodologies appeared limited as ways to research these changes. ‘Naturalistic research’ inquiry examined the individual stories that people told about their day-to-day practice and experiences. It was limited to the extent that it failed to consider the relation of these stories to each other or to their socio-historical contextual positioning. Writings about post-colonialism, whiteness and cultural studies pertained to the taken-for-granted ways of knowing and being in the world that framed those relations. They did not always spell out how these frames can be understood in relation to the discussions of individual practice and experience or as contingent conceptual or historic domains of expression. The problem was to provide a methodological frame that could work from each of these three vantage points: individual experience and practice; the interconnectedness of those experiences and practices within a particular field or practical domain; and the normalised ways of knowing and being in the world which both frame and are framed by those individual experiences and practices. A crucial task was to find a methodology that could explore the individual experiences and practices of teachers and parents as they were spoken about in the local/global contexts of contemporary schools and as these conversations were positioned, no matter how temporarily within the shaping conditions of the ontological context.

The paper has four sections. The first section, ‘Defining diversity in the local global’ examines definitions of cultural and raced difference in an increasingly globalised world and the limited scope of present methodologies to look at these discussions. The second section, ‘Framing narrations’ spells out the dimensions of a different approach that considers the data from three different levels of analytical abstraction: narrational practices, narrational fields and narrational maps. The third section, ‘Reading from the third dimension’ examines the usefulness of this frame as a comprehensive way of reading the research data. The final section, ‘A question of methodology, considers new directions for methodology when researching diversity as it is evident in recent and increasingly globalised times.

Defining Diversity in the Local Global

Notions of diversity, and with it conceptions of Australian multiculturalism, have long been noted as paradoxical, ambivalent notions. Australian policy documents, public debate and academic literatures interrogate the dualistic relation between difference and sameness that underpins debates about Australian multiculturalism and within it conceptions of diversity. In a recent anthology, The future of Australian multiculturalism, Gillian Bottomly (1999) argues that Australian policy documents ‘conclude with a statement that social cohesion is ... [about] unity in diversity’. Bottomly’s position is that such cultural diversity continues within conditions of relentless national-centricism. Gunew(1994) concurs, pointing out that these that these debates take place alongside wider notions of belonging and not belonging within a community. She contends that multiculturalism provides the language to mark out the boundaries which separate nation from that which is not nation. More than that however, Gunew argues, multiculturalism provides the limit, which distinguishes between that which is intrinsic and that which is extrinsic to us. The violence of framing sets the conditions of these possibilities:

The rationale for this procedure is precisely the underlying logic of classic deconstruction, which posits that the elements excluded in the analytical process are the considerations of possibilities. Thus the exclusions or marginalisations of certain writings in fact frame the conditions of those other writings, which are included or
endorsed by the analytical process. 'Framings always sustains and contains that which, by itself collapses forthwith. (Gunew, 1994, p.28)

In providing the frame, Gunew (1994) argues, multicultural conception and practice reconceptualizes the borders between usness and themness, margin and centre, with the Australian imagination.

Globalisation in its various 'scapes' deepens even as it disrupts these relations [Appadurai, 1996 #225]. As communications, technologies, capital and labour markets, and the mass movement of people and services change everyday practice the ability of national states to structure the materialities of the day-to-day is broached.\footnote{Literatures of globalisation cover a number of different literatures not all of which are relevant here. I am particularly drawn to discussions by Bauman (1997; 1990; 1997; 1998; 2001) and his vivid analysis of the paradoxical tension between the fluidity of definition and the assertions of positionality that underpin contemporary processes of globalisation. I also find important literatures which trace the relation between commodification, culture and globalisation (see for example: Jamison(1998), Featherstone(1995); the relation between globalisation and the transformation of concept and imagination Appadurai (1996), McCarthy (1998), in which the most taken-for-granted of boundaries between identities and machines Haraway (1991), identities and their genetic portraits Haraway (2000) and space and time Virilio (1993) become confused, conflated and differently useful. I find interesting the work of Giddens (1999, 1990) and Beck (2000) who consider the sense of risk as the sense of the present becomes deferred to the future and also confused. Paolini(1997) and Ashcroft (2001) importantly although in quite different ways, take the understandings that emerge within these literatures and relate them to the literatures of identity and hybridity. The articulation of the relation between identities as they change within an increasing globalised world makes up a central focus of this paper.}
The contemporary transcendence of relations between individuals, the nation state and the international world has put pressure on the traditional ways these entities are understood. The most taken-for-granted notions – time, space, identity – appear as altered. Globalisation, Rosenberg (2000, p.2) points out,

is said to signal not only a truly basic social change – the supplanting of modernity with globalism – but also, as a result of this change, the redundancy of some of the founding ideas of classical social theory, extending even to the very concept of 'society' itself. Even more dramatically, globalisation has necessitated a wholesale 'spatialisation of social theory'. On the basis of a retrospective discover of the centrality of speed of communication in the constitution of social orders ... in short for some writers ... globalisation has now become 'the central thematic for social theory, and a key idea by which we understand the transition of human society into the third millennium.

Globalisation has become a keyword to describe the changes that would seem to have overtaken us at the beginning of the twenty first century, the fluidity of borders, the conflation of time and space and the sense that identity itself is 'cyborg'; in process, multiple in its manifestation and in negotiation with itself.\footnote{For discussions about globalisation and its relation to: conceptions of time and space see particularly [Virilio, 1993 #217]; notions of cyborg identity see particularly [Haraway, 1991 #157]; as post modern and a moveable feast see [Hall, 1996 #270].} The conception of the human person as essentially formed, fully centred, unified and reasonable, Hall (1992) contends, is put 'under erasure' and reconstructed as 'post-modern', a 'moveable feast' in which conceptions of who-we-are are in process and at odds with themselves. Hall's (1996) argument is that the contingent disjunctive nature of identity as we know it remains in tension with the ontological positions to which it is tied (no matter how temporarily) in a changing, world people move differently,
become ‘tourists’ and ‘vagabonds’ [Bauman, 1998 #262] as some consume identities, time and space in ways never before even as they remain caught as:

Like in all other known societies the post-modern, consumer society is a stratified one. But is possible to tell one kind of society from another by the dimensions along which it stratifies its members. The dimension along which those ‘high up’ and ‘low down’ are plotted in a society of consumers, is their degree of mobility – their freedom to choose where to be. [Bauman, 1998 #262], p.86

Bauman’s (1999) reminder is that the real difference between members of a society is not what one calls oneself but the difference between belonging and not belonging and the ability to choose who and how one belongs. He notes the paradoxical relation which has developed within an increasingly globalised world as local communities, increasingly worried by changes which seem imposed from outside, turn instead on those groups of people who are understood not to properly belong within the community.7. His argument is that multiculturalism, so often seen as a panacea in this divisive debate, is also problematic. At its most definitive, concepts of multi-cultural define cultural communities in totalising terms, which delineate them as essentially different, mutually exclusive and tightly bordered. Even the notion of a multicultural society as one that tolerates cultural difference, the free flow of cultural propositions and freedom of cultural choices assumes the attribution of cultural identity as an entity separate from that of citizenship and community. Tolerance, Beck(2000) reminds us needs to be re-examined in more than one direction. The moral territory of the self and the truth of others needs to be understood as a difference of power between the conception of these truths, the scope for action and the way in which one belongs.

In Australia, discussions about diversity and the ambivalent relations that they represent have been so often coded as conversations about multiculturalism8. It is important to realise the different trajectory that Australian multiculturalism has taken to either Britain or the United States. Australian multiculturalism is described in a recent chapter by Jon Stratton and Jen Ang (1998) as part of a top-down political strategy, a centrepiece of official government policy, implemented by those in power precisely to advance the inclusion of ethnic minorities within Australian culture.9 As such, Australian multiculturalism is a crucial concept through which the national imagination is made manifest. It is not just a new policy for dealing with immigrants but is, in effect, a new national cultural policy. In particular, the discussion of anti-racism policy never really took place in Australia in the way that it took place in the United States and in Britain. The transformative effects of globalization add another and different aspect to the ambivalent relations these literatures predict underpin discussions about diversity in contemporary western societies such as Australia. My concern is how one might research the paradoxical relations that underpin these discussions as they occur about real people as they work in the particular and local context of a Melbourne school.

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7 See particularly [Bauman, 2001 #395].
8 For discussion of multiculturalism as a codeword see [Singh, 1987 #321]. For discussions about ways multiculturalism has been used to discuss matters of race and ethnicity see for instance [Stratton, 1998 #199], [Bottomley, 1999 #475], [Gunew, 1994 #26].
9 See Stratton & Ang (1998)
Reading from the Third Dimension

My project was to examine the ways that ethnic and race relations were spoken about in one local Melbourne school in two different years 1988 and 1998, as that school was transformed by demographic and global change. In 1988, this focus, the questions that support it and the conceptualisation of the study analysis were phrased in terms of multicultural policies and practices. Such conceptions of ethnic relations not only seemed useful, they seemed self-evident. In 1988 it did not occur to me (or to most of those to whom I spoke) that these relationships could be discussed in other ways. In 1998, I set out to discuss ethnic relations as they are understood in terms of anti-racist policy and practice. However, I found that despite my different understanding of these notions, it was even more difficult to speak about racism than it had been ten years earlier. By the end of that year, I was troubled by three observations. First, when I asked the question ‘how are ethnic and race relations spoken about in schools?’ I found that teachers and parents seldom spoke explicitly about those relations at all. Second, when I asked the question ‘How do ethnic relations take place in schools?’ I found that teachers and parents usually spoke about concepts of multiculturalism and the effectiveness of multicultural policies and programs. Conversations about racism, and the way raced and ethnic relations were conceptualised and embodied within the school, were seldom and often only reluctantly broached. Third, when discussing people’s experiences with ethnic relations and when considering matters of multiculturalism and racism, I found that, despite their reluctance to speak about it, people did rely on deeply held notions about ‘who they are’ and ‘who we are’ and the relation between these notions.

The methodologies I had at my disposal were mediated in the way they might study race and ethnic diversity. In 1988 I set out as an artist, a kind of photographer who came from outside to take a picture of an ‘instant-in-action’. My goal was to take a snapshot of school experiences that were individual in their circumstance even as they were caught within contexts, which were fluid, and in a state of ‘mutual simultaneous shaping’. As a portrait-maker, apparently unimpeded by the world outside the school, I sought to understand the moving shadows contained within the discussion. It is not that I considered myself to be value-free or that I could know the truth. My task was one of verstehen, of ‘interpretive understanding’, of conceptualising both the nature of the activity and the meaning that individuals assigned to their actions. Following from Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba’s (1985) ‘Naturalistic Paradigm’ I considered the voices of individuals as they attached multiple, constructed and holistic meaning to the experiences they met with in their everyday life. It was a process from which I could not consider myself separate. I, the knower, and they, as known, were inseparable. The end-point of such studies was the point of ‘saturation’; the culmination of a constant shuffling between social events within their pristine ‘natural setting’ and the ‘grounded theory’ which I as the researcher developed through this dialogue between conception and experience.

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10 See Smith (1983) for an explanation of this approach as it underpinned my work in 1988.
11 See also Guba and Lincoln’s (1999) recent summary of this approach.
In 1998, my research model continued to depend on the tools suggested in Lincoln and Guba’s *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985). However, the ways that I understand these methodological practices and my role as a researcher had changed. I no longer imagined that the world that I studied was something that belonged to others but rather that it was a shared and lived world in which I was both active and positioned. The task was to reconstitute as problematic an everyday world already located within the knower’s consciousness and within the various and differentiated matrices of my own experiences as researcher. This was to uncover a world where ways of knowing and being in the world intersect, change and matter differently.

A central insight within Lincoln and Guba’s naturalistic approach is their conception of the constructedness of reality where:

> Events, persons, objects are indeed tangible entities. The meanings and wholeness derived from or ascribed to these tangible phenomena in order to make sense of them, organise them or re-organise a belief system, however, are constructed realities.

(Linear and Guba, 1985, p.84)

Their argument is that reality, was it to exist in itself, could not be recognised. Rather, the world that is ‘known’ can only be known through the construction or the beliefs about that reality. As there are multiple ways that individuals might construct reality, Lincoln and Guba argue that reality is multiply constructed and disjunctive. The individual in this approach is an experiencing, changing, unitary being who makes sense of the world in ways which can be considered rational but are nevertheless unpredictable as decisions are made individually and separably within changing places and times.

Following from the insights made within literatures of cultural studies and post-colonialism I am reminded that conceptions of the everyday world are not always already there, nor are they discretely individual and necessarily differentiated responses within a disinterested context. Rather they are profoundly interwoven within the ways that the world is made meaningful to experiencing subjects through shared language. The arrangement of knowledge and facts is one that is made through the day-to-day activities of the real people, even as the practical experiences of everyday lives are made through these same relations. This relation between day-to-day practice, the negotiation of facts and the taken-for-granted of ‘a historical forever’ make up what I have called the terrain of ‘imagination’. Marion O’Callaghan defines this term, ‘imagination’ as:

> The selecting out and rearrangement of ‘facts’ in order to provide coherence, framework and seeming unity between ideas and action, or more precisely to provide a basis for the direction of social relationships and the social creation of categories. It is what is imagined that posits the ‘natural’, that is, the normal, the fixed and unchanging. Seeming to exist in a historical forever, this is nevertheless framed by the present.

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13 See particularly Smith’s (1987) book *The everyday world as problematic* as well as her recent book *Writing the social* (Smith, 2001).


15 For materials, which explore social constructions of reality see Berger and Luckman (1976). For theories that the world is made meaningful through unequally empowered ways of meaning, consider, for instance, Gee (1996a) and Fairclough (1989). For theories, which consider the relation between these ways of meaning and subjectivity consider, for example, Hall (1997b), Henriques et al (1984), Grossberg (1996b), and Weedon (1995).
put it in another way, imagination is socially created in what follows, not precedes, the structure of social relations. (O’Callaghan, 1995, p.22)

O’Callaghan defines the terrain of imagination as the taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world that provide the frame through which everyday practice and the negotiation of social conditions take place. At the same time she maintains that these structures are ‘socially created’ and emerge from negotiations between those same relations. To contemplate social relationships through O’Callaghan’s definition of imagination is to consider them in terms of the most basic categories of human existence. These are frameworks of meaning which underpin every aspect of the universe of social knowledge, the ideas, facts and unities which formulate it and the normalised ways of understanding and being within it. The world, as it is viewed from this viewpoint seems self-evident and forever present, inviolate. Nevertheless, these ways of understanding and being in the world do not exist in themselves. The formulation of the universe as it is known and practised remains firmly fixed in relation to its negotiation within the social world. It remains linked within the unpredictable process that interweaves the actions and ideas of identities and the ways of meaning and practice in which they are part. The ‘terrain of the imagination’ defines the ‘taken-for-granted’ ways things are known about and done in the world but also the contingent link of these processes with their socio-historical and cultural context and with day-to-day experience and practice.¹⁶

The terrain that I describe here is a shifting, changing one where unequally empowered ways of meaning are struggled over by experiencing individuals who are themselves caught within these same ways of understanding. Atvah Brah (1996) in her particular imagination of diasporic space provides an important description of the multilayered complexity of these relations. She reminds us that that these relationships are not only ones of concept but also ones of materiality played across patterned fields of power as they constitute and transform social relations and identities. Constructs such as class, gender and race and ways of talking about them as multiculturalism and racism are made as ‘a specific type of power relation’ produced and exercised in and through a myriad of economic, political and cultural practices. These come together in imagined spaces in which:

Individuals and collectivities are simultaneously positioned in social relations constituted and performed across multiple dimensions of differentiation: that these categories always operate in articulation. Multi-axiality foregrounds the intersectionality of economic, political and cultural facets of power. It highlights that power does not inhabit the realm of macro structures alone, but is thoroughly implicated in the everyday of lived experience. Multi-axiality draws attention to how power is exercised across global institutions ... On the other hand, it emphasises the flow of power within the inter-and intra-subjective space. That is, it is equally firmly tuned to the unexpected disruptions of psychic processes to the complacency of rationality. (Brah, 1996, p.242)

Brah’s analysis expands the point developed here. It is not just that individuals and social collectivities and normalised conception are linked. It is that this ‘multi-axiality’ is formed as an intersection between different facets of power. The terrain that the imagination considers is a never-reached, always-in-process construction of contingent and often-disjunctive ways of meaning and practice that make up the ways of knowing and being in the world within socio-historic place and time. Its

¹⁶ This codification of the world as it is made and known and is caught in a formation of ‘linkage’ has been described by Hall and by Grossberg as ‘articulation’. For an in-depth discussion of articulation see Grossberg (1992, 1996a).
topography is not singular but consists of unequally empowered multifarious, disjointed, parallel, conflicting, incompatible and compound notions. Moreover, the power of imagined space does not remain as one of concept, but is profoundly material. Its logics and the notional and structural conditions it engenders, mediate the relation between day-to-day experiences and practices of individuals and their social world. It marks the different but always-possible location of ‘real’ positions and ‘real’ people.

As a participant within these same imagined spaces I understand their narration from three different, but integrated vantage points. These viewpoints can be understood as an articulated relation between three levels from which the social can be analysed: the narrational practice, the narrational field and the narrational map. From the vantage point provided by narrational practice I examine the seeming ad hoc nature of individual experiences and stories and the ways that experiencing individuals understand and participate within their day-to-day worlds. Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) concern to understand the multiple constructions of the reality of people caught within interacting but not necessarily related events and processes exemplifies this position. At the level of narrational fields I explore the patterned yet contingent and often-disjunctive ways in which meaning and practice are related to a particular conceptual or practical domain. This includes discussions about discourse formations such as multiculturalism, nationalism and racism, situational structures such as the school and the home and structural processes such as race, class and gender. The analysis of these negotiations and their often-discordant links with each other and with socio-cultural place and time has been the subject of a number of methodological works including those by critical theorists as I discussed them in the last chapter.\(^\text{17}\) The final vantage point, that of the narrational map, considers the interconnectedness of narrational fields as they define the essential ways of knowing and being in the world.\(^\text{18}\) Recent writing about post-colonialism and whiteness explore and problematise these taken-for-granted maps.\(^\text{19}\)

**Table 1: Levels of Analysis.**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological level</th>
<th>Methodological focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrational practices</td>
<td>Considers individual experiences and stories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrational fields</td>
<td>Considers the interconnectedness of individual practices as contingent and often-disjunctive ways of meaning and practice related to a particular conceptual or practical domain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrational maps</td>
<td>Considers the interconnectedness of narrational fields which make up the normalised ways of knowing and being in the world.</td>
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The methodological frame that I am developing is concerned with a complex, changing, unequally empowered, ‘multi-axi![el’ social world articulated from three levels. The first is concerned with the individuality of experience as it is understood and talked about by people as they discuss their day-to-day practice. The second contemplates the proposition that these changing ways of knowing and being in the world are made and remade as fields of meaning by those who are both positioned by


\(^{18}\) I am much indebted to Paul James’ (1996) work on analytical abstraction from which this approach takes its inspiration and methodological parameters.

them and participate in their making. The final viewpoint emphasises the notion that these fields of meaning, however contingent, make up the world as it is known to the experiencing subjects who move within it. Recent post-colonial literatures and cultural studies writings describe identities as fragmenting, changing, contingent, ‘in process’ entities, even as they consider these subjects as firmly positioned by framings of race and ethnicity, gender and class. They remind us that the interconnection of meaning and identity is not an innocent process but represents real struggles played out within the times and spaces of contemporary Western societies. These fight together to negotiate the most crucial of conditions: who one is, how one can belong, and how one can speak. They define the territorial struggles that define who can and who cannot belong within local communities such as schools, and they reconsider the ways of understanding and meaning that frame these relations.

In the next section, I examine this frame as it can be applied to conversations within the local and global context of a Melbourne school. I take just two examples here: the one from 1988 and the one from 1998.

**Discussing Ethnic Relations – 1988**

But the only sort of racial comments we’ve ever had was we went to this school camp and we came back and the train stopped at Warrigal and a girl got on and she shoved her bag in the face of one of the students and I got really upset and I said, “Do you mind?” “Move on.” “Get away from these students” and the other kids sort of sobbing a bit and they said, “We wish we were back at Southgate. Everyone accepts us there we’re just normal.”

Q. So there racism came from someone outside the school?
A. That’s the only time I’d ever heard it. When we’d go with our kids because our badminton and volleyball are really great and I’ve got sucked in to doing table tennis a couple of times ... The kids absolutely go like this when they hear ... but we never hear anything and the kids don’t seem to feel it. They don’t sense it at all which is good.

Q. But you sense it from outside. (Williams, 1988, ll. 598 – 612)

In 1988, teachers and parents are almost unanimously agreed that ethnic relationships are good at the school. Racism is something that they ’haven’t noticed’, something about which they ’haven’t had any problems’ as they ’get along together wonderfully’. There has been, as Amanda Winters points out, racism in the past, and racist acts perpetuated by others outside the school, but at this time most tell me, ‘they get along wonderfully’ there’s ‘no problem’. There are good and bad Australians’, Tom Paterson says. ‘They are nice people. It’s really nice walking around and speaking to them’, Sally Williams tells me. ‘I have taught them. I have found out how nice they are – at least most of them’, Bill Kelly explains. ‘I don’t have any prejudice’, Kelly tells me. ‘Racial comments’ don’t happen at the school, Williams reiterates.

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21 I am much indebted to Paul James’ (1996) work on analytical abstraction from which this approach takes its inspiration and methodological parameters.

The ‘levels of analysis’ approach developed here emphasises practices, fields and maps of narration. However, this is not to imply that narration is the central or overriding practice of social life – only that it central to the present analysis.

142
Nevertheless, I note that community members are included differently. In the quote cited above Williams broaches the concept of ‘racial comments’. Conceptions of inside and outside, belonging and not belonging change throughout the discussion. At the beginning of my discussion with Williams the community includes both Williams and her students – as ‘we’ travel back together from school camp. She differentiates her school from those outside the school who do not know how to behave with her students. The condition ‘we’ changes as the passage continues. These students are the students who belong to the school community. They are ‘our’ students and there is no racism at the school. In a sense Williams owns these students and ensures that nothing happens to them. Her words are an acknowledgement that some are other and do not belong. Yet even as Williams (and I) reaffirms her position with her students, the actual relation is barely stated. ‘The kids’ ‘don’t sense it at all’ Sally Williams says. ‘But you sense it from outside’, I reply. The definition of what it is not stated. It is the unmentionable thing that doesn’t happen, that the kids ‘don’t feel’ but which nevertheless can be seen and sensed. It is the racism which she has only witnessed once but which she nevertheless notes from the outside.

**Discussing Ethnic Relations – 1998**

Things you read about in other schools, seems to be ... It doesn’t happen within the school. It’s lovely to come to this school It’s got the most wonderful atmosphere, really, like, I can’t remember. It’s ten years ago, this famous comment, that came from one kid that’s gone around, about what they did in the holidays and, why they seemed to be glad to get to school and they said. “Well, holidays are boring, because all we do is stay around Southgate and stay around home.” “Why don’t you go out and go to, go into the city?” And they say, “Well, in Southgate no one calls us names.” So, they’re very happy to be in Southgate, but it’s boring, because there’s not the diversity and stuff they want. To get diversity, they’ve got to go out, Even though they’re born in Australia they get called names. It’s safer, easier or it’s pleasant to hang around in Southgate and not get called names. When they venture out, they have to put up with abuse. (Kelly, 1998, ll. 332 – 423)

In 1998, as in 1988, teachers and parents are agreed that ‘they’ve had enough of’ talking about ‘it’ and that discussions about racism are not relevant at the school. Teachers and parents iterate that there are ‘no racial intolerances’, ‘no problems if they have to interact’, ‘you don’t have that in classes here’, ‘there is really nothing there’. Still teachers and parents express unease about possible conflict in ways that they did not in 1988. ‘Occasional conflicts occur’ Stephen Barrows says to me, ‘but they are based on particular incidents. You couldn’t put it down to general racial intolerance’. ‘I don’t think that that’s because the other kids are ostracising them’, Bill Kelly explains. ‘They just don’t interact’, ‘they don’t mix’, they are not antagonistic towards each other, ‘there’s nothing overt’. Things happen between students all the time, and are normal interactions between teenagers. Most particularly, teachers and parents argue that diversity itself is the reason why ethnic relations at the school are good. Southgate is understood by teachers particularly as ‘somewhere safe’, ‘comfortable’, more ‘relaxed’, ‘because everyone’s different’. The reason kids like being here is ‘because they’ve got so many people who are in the same position’.

In the quote cited above, Kelly reiterates the conception that Southgate is different from most other places. The school has ‘the most wonderful atmosphere’. It is different from elsewhere in that students don’t get called names, ‘it’s pleasant’ and
‘it’s safer, easier’. Students are ‘very happy’ to be here but it is ‘boring’. Yet, elsewhere is frightening. When students ‘venture out’ they have to ‘put up with abuse’. The actuality of the relation of what is out there is not quite mentioned. It’s the ‘things you read about in other schools’ and don’t happen here. ‘It doesn’t happen within the school’. What is interesting in Kelly’s discussion is that the scariness on the outside is the very diversity that has made the school safer on the inside. They, the ethnic student, remains within the school where they feel safe in their difference, both critiqued and too frightened to mix with others on the outside.

In a third order of analysis, the taken-for-granted concepts that underpin the word diversity themselves become the focus of analysis. Diversity is spoken about as something that belongs to them: ‘it’s safer, easier or it’s pleasant’ for them. It is the exciting thing which stops the outside from being boring and which makes the school the comfortable place it is. There is a second conception of what difference means but these things are almost unsayable. Those are the other things, which happen to them but which do not happen at this school. Outside the school, they get called names and are abused. They are glad to get back to the school where they are at home. These are the almost, not quite mentionable things that don’t ‘happen’, the ‘things’ you ‘read about in other schools’. ‘It’ is something that happens elsewhere so that it’s safe and more pleasant at the school. A third logic is traced here. Despite the perception that the school is a safe place, with a wonderful atmosphere the differentiations between others and selves remain. The school is exciting because of its diversity, safe because the underlying differences implied by diversity are comfortably dealt with. Diversity is both implicated in the ‘wonderful atmosphere’ but also problematic and potentially dangerous both for the students who put up with abuse if they ‘venture out’ and to the school where ‘the things you read about in other schools, seems to be … it doesn’t happen’.

The problem here was that people spoke a lot about race and ethnic relations but only in particular ways. In both 1988 and 1998 parents and teachers spoke about changed school populations, about the multicultural policies and practices implemented to deal with them, and the diverse and peaceful nature of school relationships. What were quite different areas of discussion – demographic change, curriculum reform, and diversity – became sites where conversations about race and ethnic relations took place by proxy. Issues about belonging and not belonging remained crucial issues, even when these ideas were not named or were alluded to indirectly or euphemistically. The second strand of this analysis examined these almost silent conversations as they spoke about ‘it’. ‘It’, in this case, alluded to the juncture between feeling part of the school community and not quite part of the school community. In 1988, a few teachers and parents were concerned that people might behave badly or well towards them. Bad people made it difficult to belong properly within the school community. In 1998, this relation became increasingly confused and it became increasingly difficult to know whom the good or the bad people were or when one might be included or excluded in this way. I found that ‘it’ was given a second, asymmetric meaning. When I re-examined the multicultural narrations, which took up so much of my conversations with teachers and parents ‘It’ came to describe the juncture between the negotiations, which took place about demography, curriculum, and diversity, and the negotiation of the taken-for-granted ways that positioned people as belonging and not belonging within the community. In 1988, Sally Williams and I noted that ‘the kids don’t sense it’ ‘But that you sense it from the
outside’. In 1998, the juncture between the conceptual and material terrain of these debates and the ontological positions of being in the world to which they are related became almost unmentionable.

A Question of Methodology

This paper emerges from research to define the dimensions of diversity and difference within a local Melbourne, Australian school and the requirement to understand these changes in times of increasing globalisation. Contemporary methodological practices were each in their ways, limited as a means to explore these notions. Post-structuralist theories (particularly, as they have been formulated as theories of critical literacy and cultural studies) provided ways to understand the increasingly fluid, changing and ambivalent relation that has underpinned the altered and globalised world evident in recent times. These theories were limited in so far as: (i) they ignore the persistence of structure and normalised positionings (particularly as they are defined within literatures of post-colonialism, race and whiteness; (ii) and they do not consider the relation of these notions to the particular and day-to-day educational experiences of community members of contemporary schools. Contemporary ethnographic practice (Lincoln and Guba (1985), Denzin and Lincoln (1998) too often considered individual experience and practice as being ad hoc and multiply constructed, and as separate from socio-historical debate and circumstance. What was needed was an appropriate methodology that could broach the fraught relation that articulates the haphazard world of day-to-day experience; the increased fluidity of post-modern conceptions of identity and difference; and the taken-for-granted logics that continue to provide the ‘shaping’ conditions of those ‘new times’ (Hall 1996).

What I have proposed is a way of looking at the ambivalent, multi-axial relations that underpin discussions about diversity from the three different directions provided by what I have called narrational practices, fields and maps. The formulation of these different methodological vantage points allowed the ambivalent relations that underpin those debates to be explored more comprehensively. The analysis of a local school in Melbourne, Australia exemplifies this paradoxical relation. In 1988, teachers suggest that racism doesn’t happen. At the same time these conversations are underpinned by descriptions that clarify those who are inside and who are outside their community. In 1998, issues of belonging and not belonging continue to be a crucial. Now, however, it is no longer easy to define who is on the outside and who is on the inside. I am arguing that the obsessive evasiveness, which informs this orientalising logic, underpins the ways that this relation can be understood and spoken about. From the vantage point of narrational practices, I recounted the fragmented stories teachers and parents told me about the ways that ethnic and race relationships happened within their day-to-day contexts. From the second vantage point, that of narrational fields, I made the observation that when discussing ethnic and race relationships at a Melbourne school, people avoid speaking about these relationships and speak a lot about multiculturalism. Conversations about racism were difficult to broach. Nevertheless, notions of ethnic and race difference continued to provide a focus for the discussion. From the vantage point of narrational maps I argued that deep-seated notions that defined who-we-are in terms of who-we-are-not underpin these conversations. It is the juncture between the pervasiveness of these logics as they conceptualise and are embodied within positioned identities, thr negotiation
of this conceptual and material domain, which underpinned the way that race and relations could be understood and, as such, how they could be spoken about. The purpose of this paper is to consider new directions that could trace this ambivalent relation as it underpinned these conversations about diversity in a local Melbourne Australian context wracked by global change.

References


