

Towards a Decolonising Pedagogy: Understanding Australian Indigenous Studies through Critical Whiteness Theory and Film Pedagogy

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This article explores student and teacher engagement with Australian Indigenous Studies. In this article I identify key themes in the film *September* (2007) that demonstrate how the film can be used as a catalyst for student learning and discussion. Critical whiteness theory provides a framework to explore three themes, the invisibility of whiteness, the reachability of whiteness and the cultural interface. Critical whiteness theory identifies the way in which non-Indigenous people centralise and normalise whiteness within colonised societies, and particularly considers how white privilege is maintained. Interpreting the film *September* through the lens of critical whiteness theory contributes to translating curriculum and social justice aims of education into action.

■ **Keywords:** film pedagogy, Australian Indigenous Studies, whiteness

In 1999 Reynolds published his landmark book, *Why weren't we told* and identified a generation of Australians with an educational 'blind spot' in relation to Australian Indigenous peoples. Describing his schooling from 1944 to 1954 Reynolds wrote,

I knew little about the history of Aboriginal-European relations, nothing about contact and conflict on the frontier. I had no idea there had been massacres and punitive expeditions. I was ignorant about protective and repressive legislation and of the ideology and practice of white racism. (Reynolds, 1999, p. 4)

Arguably, Australian Indigenous Studies has remained our 'education blind spot'. Kenway defines blind spots as 'things which one is ignorant or prejudiced about . . . both unintentional and deliberate failings of sight' (2008, p. 4) and Pascoe (2007) describes 'white Australia's ignorance' regarding the effects of colonisation as 'pervasive and profound' (p. 217). Pascoe argues that 'Australian history isn't boring, it's just too hot to handle; it calls into question everything that Australians believe about themselves' (Pascoe, 2007, p. 201). Educators have an important role in connecting curriculum guidelines with teaching Australian Indigenous Studies. This work aims to rethink

Australian Indigenous Studies using the film *September* as an educational tool which explores experiences of racially-based advantage and disadvantage for both its Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters.

Introducing the Film *September*

September (2007) is an inaugural project of the Tropfest Feature Film Program, directed by Peter Carstairs and produced by John Polson. The film is set in the West Australian wheat belt during 1968 and is a story of two families negotiating social, racial and class boundaries. The central character Rick is a struggling white farmer who is unable and/or unwilling to pay his Aboriginal farmworker (Michael) wages. The film explores the ethical implications for long-term unpaid labour for Indigenous workers such as Michael, contrasted with Rick's justifications for continuing to not pay wages. *September* is also a coming-of-age story. Michael and Rick's respective sons Paddy and Ed are young adults who negotiate their friendship

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within racial boundaries that unsettle their relationship. Paddy and Ed are best friends, they live with their families on the same farm, practise boxing in the ring they built together, and Ed teaches Paddy to read. But their friendship on the farm is tested when Paddy attempts to transfer their mateship into Ed's school and town environment where Ed rejects Paddy because of his aboriginality. Paddy is blamed for Ed's late night trespassing on a neighbouring farm to visit Ed's girlfriend, and the adults assume it is Paddy who has behaved badly. Ed redeems himself for these betrayals and restores their friendship by actively supporting Paddy's ambition to join the Jimmy Sharman boxing troupe rather than continue working on the farm that Ed's family owns, for no wages like his father. *September* is a film about typical adolescent angst, with universal themes such as loyalty, relationships, education, sport, family, money and ambition that secondary school students can relate to.

The film *September* is an excellent text for Indigenous studies at all secondary levels, particularly Australian history, SOSE/Humanities and English, because it allows educators to facilitate learning in Australian Indigenous Studies by contesting prevailing constructions of racism as only an individual concern. In a secondary school classroom, *September* enables an exploration of the individual implications of racially based inequity. It is an important text because it also focuses on institutional elements of racism through the young characters' access and participation in education. In addition to the individual and institutional elements, this film demonstrates enduring social constructions of racial disadvantage through its non-payment of wages for Indigenous workers storyline. It is the interconnected storylines that enable teaching and learning about the intersections of individual, institutional and social elements of racism that make this film an important classroom text. These storylines highlight themes in the film, which can be transferred into teaching lesson plans that encourage educators to revitalise Australian Indigenous Studies.

Curriculum Contexts in Australian Indigenous Studies

Australian Indigenous Studies has progressed significantly and it now features strongly in national curriculum guidelines. The Melbourne Declaration states that students should be active and informed citizens who 'understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 9). The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA; 2010) have outlined the curriculum focus for Australian Indigenous Studies, stating that: 'Indigenous perspectives, which will

be written into the national curriculum to ensure that all young Australians have the opportunity to learn about, acknowledge and respect the history and culture of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders'.

However, despite curriculum scope and frameworks, there remains a problematic gap between curriculum, actual teaching practice and classroom experiences of Australian Indigenous studies. It is the aim of this article to incorporate a theoretical framework to teaching Australian Indigenous Studies. I also aim to generate some educational strategies for educators who must respond to the curriculum and classroom demands of teaching Australian Indigenous Studies. This article thus aims to develop and critique the role of pedagogy in 'decolonising work' through Australian Indigenous Studies in secondary schools.

Australian Indigenous Studies: A Teaching Context

Most educators and students engage with Australian Indigenous Studies work in a professional space that Nakata (2007) describes as the cultural interface, 'the contested space between the two knowledge systems' (p. 9); and Cowlshaw (2003) describes this space as 'cultural borderlands; the arenas of interaction and interchange between Indigenous persons and Whitefellas' (p. 11). In Australian Indigenous Studies various challenges emerge for teachers transferring curriculum frameworks into classroom lessons. Mooney, Halse, and Craven (2003) state that 'Aboriginal Studies is a part of the curriculum that is often forgotten or given superficial attention' (para. 25). Central to the difficulties many teachers face when teaching Australian Indigenous Studies is the lack of specific preservice teacher training. Mooney et al. (2003) found that 'teachers who had completed preservice training in Aboriginal Studies were more confident and willing to teach Aboriginal Studies' (para. 13). However, many teachers do not study any Indigenous content in their university degrees, and therefore transferring curriculum policy into practice is problematic. This difficulty is compounded when, as students themselves, many teachers were not taught Australian Indigenous Studies and therefore have no foundation for engaging with culturally safe curriculum and teaching practice in this area. While Australian Indigenous Studies is now mandated in the national curriculum and many teachers will teach in this area, I suggest that teaching practice has not developed sufficiently to support these inclusions. Nakata (2006) argues that efforts in this area 'do not produce much conversation in the literature about the forward movement of Indigenous scholarly production or practice in Indigenous Studies' (p. 268). Educators have decided that we *should* teach Australian Indigenous Studies, but we are less inclined to critically address *how* to teach Australian Indigenous Studies.

Australian Indigenous Studies tends to rely on tokenistic contributions to classroom content that simplistically insert 'heroes, holidays and discrete cultural elements' (Haviland, 2008, p. 41). Limiting Australian Indigenous Studies to the study of the 'exotic other', or 'confined to the 'boomerang and didgeridoo' syndrome, or tokenistically celebrating the 'one-off' events at NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) week (Aveling, 2007, p. 80) fails to extend teaching and learning in this area. Students often experience Australian Indigenous Studies as a difficult and problematic area of study. Much of the curriculum content in Australian Indigenous Studies introduces students to challenging historic and contemporary concepts of race relations in Australia. These challenges are experienced because the 'dissonance between the genocidal history of white settlement sits uncomfortably with the contemporary self-image of a progressive liberal modern multi-ethnic state' (Downing & Husband, 2005, p. 129). Debunking national myths can challenge our 'deeply naturalized national belief systems [and] ideologies [and incites] profound unease' (Perera, 2009, p. 1), and rethinking Australia's 'triumphalist history' (Stratton, 1998, p. 134) can be disconcerting for students. Addressing historical and contemporary issues in Australian Indigenous Studies can result in students' feelings 'uncomfortable and can lead white students to resist learning about race and racism' (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 278). For example, comments from Australian students in Clarke's (2008) research further illustrate this resistance as students complained that "'invasion" is a guilt trip' teachers pull on their students. One student commented: 'Like we're meant to feel that our ancestors came and like killed a billion Aborigines' (Clarke, 2008, p. 70). Similarly a teacher interviewed for the same study stated: 'I think kids *hate* being told the 'black armband' view ... They don't like being made to feel guilty for something that they didn't have any control over' (Clarke, 2008, p. 70).

I would like to suggest that it is counter-productive to teach Australian Indigenous Studies in a confronting and negative way because: 'Heightening student awareness about racism without also providing some hope for social change is a prescription for despair' (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 280). Students are not dismissing and rejecting Australian Indigenous Studies, but are contesting the way in which the curriculum and educators deliver and facilitate these studies. Incorporating critical whiteness theory in teaching practice can assist student understanding of racial disadvantage as socially constructed from individual, institutional and social elements.

What is Critical Whiteness Theory?

Moreton-Robinson (2004b) defines whiteness 'as the guise of the invisible human universal, whiteness secures hege-

mony through discourse by normalising itself as the cultural space of the West' (p. 78). Combining educational practice and film as a social representation, we can attempt to examine 'how whiteness is reproduced in domestic and public spaces' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 112). Critical whiteness theory challenges the educational emphasis on colonisation as only experienced by Indigenous peoples and can interrogate how whiteness persists as a 'regime of power' (Nicoll, 2004a, para. 33). It is important to note the limitations of broadly applying the term 'whiteness' and I acknowledge 'that the experiences of whiteness and of "white race privilege" are neither universal nor uniform' (Durie, 1999, p. 157). These categories are constantly adapting because Australia is a 'society which is colonising and decolonising at the same time' (Curthoys, 2000, p. 32). Critical whiteness theory illustrates the social construction of white privilege. It is important to focus on the social constructions of white privilege because focusing only on personal responses to racism 'effectively limits any systematic challenge of the systemic structures ... and precludes any real examination of the system' (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005, p. 161).

Theorising Critical Whiteness Theory in the film *September*

The film *September* was chosen as an important pedagogic tool because it challenges the whitening role of film and television (Dyer, 1997). In the film *September*, whiteness does *not* remain, 'invisible, unnamed and unmarked' (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, p. 80). The stories and characters in this film explicitly engage with 'whiteness as a social relationship' (Garner, 2007, p. 8). For example the non-Indigenous characters discuss how and why they cannot pay an Indigenous worker wages, thereby naming and marking their own white privilege. Therefore, this film is not a story about 'white' experiences as separate or opposed to 'black' experiences, but rather by explicitly exploring 'black and white' interactions and connections this film explicitly explores the central premise of critical whiteness theory — white privilege.

The epistemological foundations of this article are constructed within Australia's decolonising process, and specifically the claim that 'colonialism makes the world "white"' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 153). At this point, it is important to make the clear distinction between [post]colonisation and decolonisation, based on the work of Smith (1999, who argues that 'post-colonial' indicates that 'colonialism is finished business ... that the colonizers have left ... There is rather compelling evidence that in fact this has not occurred' (p. 98). Decolonisation assists our understanding of the legacy of colonialism and is understood as a 'long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power' (Smith, 1999, p. 98).

As a researcher theorising about ‘whiteness’ I risk becoming a ‘white studying whiteness trying not to reinscribe whiteness’ (Probyn, 2004, para. 2). It is not my intention to divert scholarly attention away from important Indigenous issues, rather to explore additional understanding of decolonisation. As educators and academics, we have the capacity to progress both fields, and this work aims to critique whiteness, not reinscribe it. As a beneficiary of colonisation through the cultural and financial capital I inherit from my convict ancestor, I continue to ‘enjoy the pleasures and safety of privilege’ (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 157). Miller (2008) describes this researcher position as a ‘paradoxical position’ (p. 64). From this awkward position of challenging whiteness while benefiting from it, I acknowledge that ‘the field of critical whiteness studies is full of an almost habitual anxiety about what it means to take up the category of “whiteness” as a primary object of knowledge’ (Ahmed, 2007, p. 149). I am also mindful of Jackie Huggins’ warning ‘you were and still are, a part of that colonising force’ (in Probyn, 2004, para. 8). However, as a part of the colonising force, this research shares the responsibility for also becoming a part of the decolonising force. Pedagogy can participate in the decolonising process by analysing the ‘representations of the social relations between Aboriginal peoples and white people’ while acknowledging educators (myself included) are still ‘implicated in the production of those representational systems’ (Elder, 2009, p. 19). Critiquing privilege while maintaining and enjoying my own demonstrates that ‘I am capable of many contradictory and fallible performances of my whiteness’ (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 156).

Why Film?

The focus of this article is film pedagogy, which underscores the importance of film as a powerful medium from which all Australians can understand Indigenous culture. Marcia Langton, the Foundation Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne, states that ‘Films, video and television are powerful media: It is from these that most Australians “know” about Aboriginal people’ (1993, p. 33). Cinematic pedagogy is defined by Sealey (2008) as ‘teaching and learning infused with the moving image’ (p. 7). Sealey (2008) argues that film is a learning tool and a visual literacy that asks students to ‘enter into discussion and debate with the clarity of a visual image as the catalyst’ (p. 7). Giroux describes the possibility of film to offer ‘contrasting narratives of race that can be used pedagogically to explore both racial others and “whiteness” as part of a broader discourse on racial justice’ (as cited in Hill, 1997, p. 306). Film is a dynamic and accessible teaching tool for all levels of study, and the films *Rabbit Proof Fence* and *September* are important texts to prompt discussion and debate in Australian Indigenous Studies.

‘Over’ the Rabbit Proof Fence,

The film *Rabbit Proof Fence*, directed by Phillip Noyce (2002), is used in this article as a comparative text. This film is a widely used teaching resource, and arguably [re]presents ‘whiteness’ as unyielding and without critical reflection. The film’s Stolen Generations narrative is based on the journey of Molly Craig, as written by her daughter, Doris Pilkington Garimara. *Rabbit Proof Fence* is an important Indigenous story and is a valuable resource when included in a broader suite of educational resources employed in Australian Indigenous Studies.

Rabbit Proof Fence offers a powerful image of Aboriginal survival of colonial violence and subjugation. In doing so, it inverts two centuries of the representation of Aboriginal people as a doomed or dying race, a group of people who have no place in modernity. (Collins & Davis, 2004, p. 143)

Survivalist overcoming is a powerful theme in *Rabbit Proof Fence*. The remarkable and heroic story of Molly depicted in the film is an example of what Nicoll (2004b) regards as the ‘monumentalisation of exceptional Koori individuals’ (p. 22). When the film was released in 2002 it became a critical and box-office success. Hailed for its ‘timeliness’, *Rabbit Proof Fence* introduced many Australians to the stories of the Stolen Generations and therefore made an important contribution to a broader national identity discourse. Chan (2008) argues that while ‘the Stolen Generations may offer a “counter-narrative” to official versions of Australian history it ultimately reinforces a “black and white” colonial discourse’ (p. 121). This research begins to consider the over-reliance on *Rabbit Proof Fence* as an educational resource.

Set in the 1930s, *Rabbit Proof Fence* is an historical depiction of assimilationist policy that is central to Australia’s colonised history. Molly Craig’s experiences depicted in this film are what hooks describes as ‘chronicles of pain’ (1991, p. 59). The film retells the girl’s story in a ‘universal victim theme that undermines the specific empathy it evokes, thereby ameliorating the collective guilt of the audience’ (McCarthy, 2004, p. 14). Nicoll (2004b) argues that stories about ‘atypical Aboriginal Australians serves to create a comfort zone within which we can also appraise ourselves as atypical white Australians’ (p. 22). Molly’s story depicted in *Rabbit Proof Fence* is atypical of other Stolen Generations stories detailed in the *Bringing Them Home Report* (1997). Therefore, an over-reliance on the film as a teaching resource is problematic because it offers a limited representation of the Stolen Generations and this traumatic era in Australia’s colonisation process.

Arguably, relying on a Stolen Generations story as told in *Rabbit Proof Fence* offers an example of a sanitisation of or disengagement from other Stolen Generations stories. By understanding the Stolen Generations through a heroic story in which the children are reunited with their families, *Rabbit Proof Fence* can be interpreted as representation

of 'safe, distant distortions' (Langton, 1993 as cited in Elder, 2009, p. 32). The purpose of this article is to explore and suggest other and/or additional representations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples for educators to use in Australian Indigenous Studies.

Analysis of *September*

The purpose of the following film analysis of *September* is to find a useful and challenging film for students to watch in Australian Indigenous Studies. Particular scenes were chosen for this analysis as they reflect the social constructions of race that influenced the characters. In order to undertake this analysis, I initially viewed each scene as a possible classroom text for lesson planning. My second viewing of the film was more strategic and focused on how non-Indigenous peoples were represented. Third, I watched the film to target three key themes, and transcribed particular film dialogue that conveyed the essence of each theme through the theoretical lens of critical whiteness.

Discussion

Considering three key themes in the film *September* I now turn to discuss ways in which these themes can be useful for classroom discussions and learning. First, the non-payment of wages to Indigenous farmworkers is an important theme in the film and is interrogated using critical whiteness theory's understandings of white privilege. Second, the educational experiences of the two young characters provide some interesting insights into Ahmed's (2007) 'reachability of whiteness'. The final filmic theme explored here is the boxing ring as a metaphor for Nakata's (2007) 'cultural interface'. This contested space allows the young characters in the film to interact and contest the fluidity and power dynamics of their friendship.

Challenging the Invisibility of Whiteness

A crucial premise of critical whiteness theory is challenging white people to acknowledge and analyse their own 'power, privilege and complicity' (Elder, 2009, p. 18). Critical whiteness theorists argue that as beneficiaries of colonisation, it is important to understand power and privilege and to consider the 'invisibility of whiteness and its privileged status as the unmarked race in the spectrum of races. White people must acknowledge the privilege that accords with being white' (Elder, 2009, p. 19). A central theme in the film *September* is the right of the Indigenous farmworker, Michael, to be paid wages. The non-payment of wages can be understood through critical whiteness theory because it shows the 'white' farmer, Rick, privileging his financial needs over the ethical payment of wages to Michael. The maintaining of privilege is an element of critical whiteness theory that draws attention to how and why Rick fails to pay correct wages and how that ben-

efits him. This storyline demonstrates a particular way that white people maintain privilege and dominance over Indigenous people.

The theme is extended as Rick and his wife discuss their obligations and ability to pay wages to Michael and his son Paddy. Importantly, the film also shows Michael and his wife discussing the new laws and his right to be paid wages. Michael also discusses the issue with their wider Indigenous community in town. By exploring the perspectives of both Michael and Rick the film does not allow the viewer to invest unproblematically in either family's position. Without structuring the characters in closed positions of winner or loser, the film asks its viewers to do more than relate to, agree or collude with either the position of Michael or Rick. By not providing any easy solutions, the film encourages 'critical spectatorship' (Ellsworth, 2008, p. 86). Rather, power and powerlessness are experienced as an interdependent negotiation between these two characters that is mediated by social forces.

The Reachability of Whiteness

The recurring school bus theme in the film *September* demonstrates Ahmed's (2007) phenomenological approach to whiteness, in which she describes whiteness as 'an orientation that puts certain things within reach [this includes] not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits' (p. 154). In this film, the school bus becomes the 'object' of whiteness and links the spaces between the home/farm and the school/social sphere. The school bus represents the reachability of *only* white students to access education. Therefore the non-Indigenous students 'capacity' to utilise the school bus enables them to fulfil their 'aspirations' via education.

The film *September* begins with a school bus traveling through and over the wheat fields and is a strong and recurring theme throughout the film. The school bus represents Ed's access to education and Paddy's exclusion from education, and is an example of how 'whiteness is maintained through a series of meaningfully repeated enactments' (Alexander, 2004, p. 655). In this film the repeated enactment is of the school bus transporting Ed to school and maintaining his 'white' privilege through education. Conversely, Paddy, the Indigenous character repeatedly watches the bus from a distance and this exclusion is conveyed through long-shot camera work, 'long shots . . . imply alienation and emptiness' (Rose, 2007, p. 53). By emphasising the contrasting educational experiences of the two young characters, this theme makes white privilege visible and therefore able to be discussed and critically reflected on.

The school bus theme is cleverly interwoven in this film as the viewer becomes an active spectator: being on the bus with Ed or watching the bus from a distance with Paddy. Ellsworth (1997) defines the term 'modes of address' to describe the space, 'between the film's text and



FIGURE 1

(Colour online) The school bus connecting Ed and education, *September* (Polson & Carstairs, 2007).

the viewers use of it . . . between the social and the individual' (p. 23). Therefore 'modes of address' considers how the viewer 'must enter into a particular relationship with the film's story and image system' (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 23). In the film *September*, the school bus is used to place the viewer with Ed, whose 'reachability' incorporates the school bus. In comparison, Paddy is excluded from the bus and the filmmakers use wide shot camera angles and distance shots to establish his perspective. Viewers of the film take meaning from both the perspective of Ed and Paddy and therefore this theme gives the 'spectator a privileged vantage point from which to understand, evaluate, and comprehend what occurs on screen' (Mayne, 1993, p. 25).

Critical whiteness theory challenges us to consider ways in which white dominance maintains privilege. Education as the exclusive domain of 'white' students is one aspect of white privilege that can be theorised in the film *September*. This theme facilitates a consideration that education 'held the key to gaining the cultural capital in terms of which whiteness could be safeguarded and advanced' (Coté, 2009, p. 5). Riding on the school bus confirms for the viewer that Ed's access to school is safeguarded. This is contrasted with Paddy watching the school bus from a distance, which indicates his lack of access to school. Therefore the school bus sets clear demarcation points for the characters respective educational opportunities that can be understood as a benefit of white privilege.

The school bus theme in *September* is expanded upon as Ed actively demonstrates his awareness of the benefits he receives via his 'white race privilege' (Moreton-Robinson, 2003, p. 69). This storyline shows Ed's awareness of his own advantages in attending school by including scenes that display his consistent agency in encouraging and teaching Paddy to read. Ed shares his schooling and knowledge with Paddy and this is circumventing Paddy's exclusion from the education system. Ed's proactive support of Paddy's 'home' schooling indicates a personal adjustment he has made. This adjustment can be understood through critical whiteness theory that is concerned with the 'invisibility' of white privilege because Ed's awareness and actions regarding the disparity between himself and Paddy makes the disadvantage visible. Through his tutorage of Paddy, Ed has responded to the marked difference in educational opportunities and responds accordingly within the means



FIGURE 2

(Colour online) Paddy and Ed's alternative space for learning in *September* (Polson & Carstairs, 2007).

he has available. Therefore, the schooling theme in the film can be interpreted as exploring ways in which 'white privilege' can be diluted and challenged when it is made visible and interrogated. Although Paddy is still excluded from school, he is not excluded from an alternative space for learning that he and Ed establish together.

'The Boxing Ring': A Metaphor for the Cultural Interface

The use of boxing, the boxing ring and the increasing intensity of the boxing between Ed and Paddy forms a central theme in the film *September*. The boxing theme can be interpreted as a metaphor for Nakata's (2007) 'cultural interface'. Nakata describes the cultural interface as the highly contested intersection of the Western and Indigenous domains, the, 'most complex of intersections . . . It is a place of tension that requires constant negotiation' (Nakata, 2007, p. 281). For Paddy and Ed, this constant negotiation takes place in the boxing ring. The cultural interface is the place and space where two cultures collide. In *September* the boxing ring becomes the cultural space where two competing cultural identities collide. Nakata describes the interface as a space where 'we are active agents in our own lives' (2007, p. 281), and the boys assert and re-assert both their physical and social power through the act of boxing. Both characters enter through the ropes from opposite sides of the ring, a metaphor for their different cultural positions that Nakata argues are also inherent within the cultural interface. From these differing positions, power is negotiated through the actions and conversations that take place within the ring.

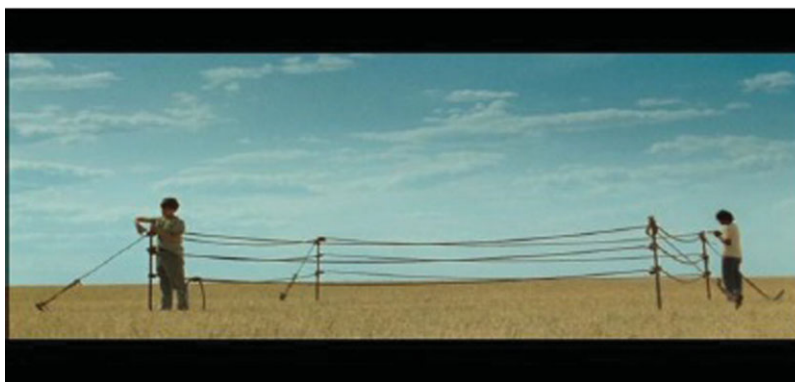


FIGURE 3

(Colour online) Paddy and Ed building the boxing ring in *September* (Polson & Carstairs, 2007).

The boxing theme in the film *September* illustrates the progression of the friendship being forged between Ed and Paddy. They build the boxing ring together and share the only pair of boxing gloves they have. As they each wear one glove they negotiate the rules of engagement for their boxing. The boxing intensifies after Ed betrays Paddy by leaving him to take the blame for their wayward excursion to visit Ed's girlfriend the night before. When their late night visit goes wrong, only one of the boys, Paddy, is discovered by the girl's father. Paddy and Ed's friendship is tested as Ed fails to admit to his parents that he was also involved. The scene opens with Paddy sitting, waiting in the centre of the boxing ring and Ed approaching nervously:

Ed (E): So what happened?

Paddy (P): Nothing.

E: Doesn't look like nothing. (Silence) Did they call the police?

P: No.

E: That's good.

P: Good for you.

E: What did you say you were doing?

P: Said I was lost.

E: Lost??

P: What else could I say? (angrily) Do you want to box or what?

Both characters put one glove on and begin sparring.

E: What'd your old man say?

P: Getting out of here anyway.

E: What'd ya mean?

P: Gonna join that boxing group (Paddy refers to Jimmy Sharman's Boxing Troupe that is touring the nearby town).

E: You?? (surprised)

P: What? You think I'm going to stay here and end up working for you?

E: You don't have a choice (lands a blow on Paddy, hard and Paddy is bleeding)

(Paddy responds punching Ed knocking him down three times).

P: Fuck you (leaves the ring upset).

Ed lies injured on the ground.

Critical whiteness theory offers us a useful means with which to understand this relationship dynamic. The theory provides parameters through which we can consider the privilege Ed assumes he will inherit. Ed's assumption that Paddy will continue to work on the farm demonstrates one of the ways whiteness operates as a 'specific location of power and privilege . . . as a taken-for-granted norm' (Haggis, 2004, p. 52). Free farm labour from Indigenous workers demonstrates how white people engineer to receive and maintain privilege. These privileges are conferred benefits, historically constructed from colonial rule and adversely affect Indigenous peoples.

The boxing between Paddy and Ed thus evolves into a competition about choice. The film illustrates the lack of choice Paddy has because he seems destined to stay on the farm and work, presumably for no wages, just like his father. Ed tries to dictate the choice Paddy has and in doing so is supplanting choice with a possessive ownership of Paddy and his labour. Therefore this scene 'explicitly articulates the issue of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships to that of property relations' (Nicoll, 2004a, para. 27). By reducing the friendship between Paddy and Ed to obligation and property the film comments on the 'possession' of Indigenous peoples, their labours, land and culture. Critical whiteness theory directs non-Indigenous people to consider ways in which this possession of Indigenous peoples and culture has provided and maintained dominance and privilege.

The boxing theme in the film *September* illustrates the ongoing negotiation between Paddy and Ed, which demonstrates that the 'identifications we make position us in relation to other social groups, sometimes in terms of alliance . . . sometimes in terms of conflict' (Sefa Dei,

2010, p. 143). The boxing ring provides the space for the characters to perform and develop their identities. This shared process is enabled because, 'racial identities are shaped by categorizations based on social histories, and no-one is ever entirely in control of their racial identity' (Pascale, 2008, p. 731). Paddy and Ed (re)negotiate their friendship that is based on the 'boss/unpaid worker' relationship they inherit from their fathers. Ahmed argues that 'whiteness is inherited through the very placement of things' (2007, p. 155). Ed is set to inherit the free labours of Paddy, a benefit his father has strategically set in place for him. Questioning such 'placements' through this theme can offer viewers of the film an example of identity as 'non-essentialised and emergent from a historical experience ... identity in this sense becomes a vehicle for multiplying and making more complex the subject positions possible' (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 113). Therefore historic and political contexts are contributing to the co-creating of Ed and Paddy's identities.

The boxing theme continues to evolve as Paddy's agency is reflected in his rejection of continuing unpaid farm work in favour of joining Jimmy Sharman's boxing troupe. Broome (1996) describes the touring boxing tents as empowering because 'transitory tent performances contributed positively to the fashioning of Aboriginal self-esteem and identity in a difficult cross-cultural world. Tent boxing produced heroes and a heroic edge to Aboriginal community history' (p. 2). In response to Paddy's decision to leave the farm, Ed takes his father's vehicle and drives Paddy to the boxing tents. Ed's proactive support for Paddy's choice demonstrates that he has reflected on his previously held assumption that Paddy would continue his unpaid work on the farm. We can interpret the actions of Ed to facilitate and support Paddy's choice to leave the farm as Ed reflecting, acknowledging and undertaking a 'process of divesting [himself] of this power' (Elder, Ellis, & Pratt, 2004, p. 221). Ed has divested himself of the power to inherit the unpaid work of Paddy. The characters have acknowledged one aspect of privilege and have begun 'dismantling the framework that supports it' (Elder et al., 2004, p. 221). This dismantling process demonstrates that 'identities are neither fixed nor unified but are about an ongoing process of becoming. Identities are constructed through the differences and exclusions, mediated within disparate and often unequal relations of power' (Giroux, 2003, p. 100). The contested space within the boxing ring is an important theme in the film because it provides the space for Paddy and Ed to negotiate new power relations.

Contesting power and privilege are central issues in critical whiteness theory. In *Talkin' up to the white woman* (2000), Moreton-Robinson offers a challenge to feminists that should equally apply to all non-Indigenous Australians: 'the real challenge for white feminists is to theorise the relinquishment of power' (p. 186). *September* offers some pathways towards meeting this challenge because it shows a relinquishment of power by Ed. Ed's

relinquishment of his power is demonstrated when he supports Paddy leaving the farm thereby discontinuing his unpaid work. By supporting Paddy to leave the farm and join a boxing troupe, Ed relinquishes his power by divesting himself of his cultural capital that he assumed he would inherit in the form of Paddy's free farm labour. This theme illustrates how white privilege can be experienced and I argue that it is a useful example to use in educational practice.

Conclusion

In 1992, former Prime Minister Paul Keating's Redfern speech challenged Australia to consider that 'the starting point [of reconciliation] might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians' (as cited in Ma Rhea & Seddon, 2005, p. 216). In this thesis I have begun to consider ways in which educators may take up Keating's challenge by incorporating critical whiteness theory and film pedagogy into Australian Indigenous Studies. My aim in this article has been to demonstrate that a decolonising pedagogy depends on non-Indigenous people considering the conferred benefits they have inherited as a result of European invasion. The film analysis I have conducted focuses on making whiteness visible, and therefore contests the invisibility of white privilege. Critical whiteness theory investigates the social constructions of whiteness, and the three central themes I analyse in the film connect individual experiences with the wider social constructions of white privilege. This article has identified *September* as a useful and alternative text to facilitate challenging but necessary work in Australian Indigenous Studies. I advocate for the inclusion of *September* in Australian Indigenous Studies because it explicitly explores the perspectives of non-Indigenous people without silencing an Indigenous viewpoint. Through the interconnected stories of an Indigenous and non-Indigenous family, *September* illustrates some aspects of Indigenous disadvantage while critiquing the underlying social structures and personal positions of non-Indigenous people that contribute to that situation of inequity.

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