

BEING AND BECOMING PAKEHA: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN'S STORIES DESCRIBING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE PAKEHA

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This paper explores the complexity for white children constructing a positive ethnic identity in Aotearoa New Zealand, a post-colonial nation. The research that informs this paper was developed in response, primarily, to two factors. Firstly, the New Zealand Government recently implemented an educational curriculum which stipulates a vision for all children to develop positive identities. Secondly, the concerns for the hegemonic white, historically settler, population (Pākehā), who struggle to find a sense of belonging in traditionally defined ethnic groups (Bell, 2009). So, given these constraints, how do Pākehā children, in a New Zealand urban school, articulate their emerging understanding of Pākehā identity? Through a methodology of narrative inquiry, children were encouraged to explore and share their ideas on Pākehā identity. Their ideas were expressed as small stories through three key approaches of: listening alongside children while engaged in process drama; listening to their stories in a semi-structured interview; and through participation in a range of narrative activities. Their small stories were gathered, grounded, and threaded into themes that demonstrated the in-between, fluid, and evolving nature of Pākehā ethnic identity. By identifying specific markers that could be grouped under the headings *Blood*, *Place of Birth*, and *Belonging*, the children also articulated the importance for Pākehā of their historical and contemporary relationship with Māori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand. Throughout the process of listening to the children's stories, significant shifts were observed in how they explained Pākehā as an ethnic identity.

Through participation in a collaborative drama experience, children were able to voice for themselves ideas about ethnic identity and challenge their previous assumptions based on binary understandings. Their developing awareness of the potential and limits of choice, and of racism, was also captured. These findings are significant to post-colonial and multi-cultural societies, where often there is a tension between the construction of traditional, emerging, and hybrid identities. The children's stories in this study, demonstrate that the emergence of new, hybrid, and positive identities can be encouraged. In addition, the possibility of racial bias can be discouraged, through political and educational practices which involve exploration of identity in a safe environment, and challenges to the notion of an ascribed identity.

Bell, A. (2009). Dilemmas of settler belonging: Roots, routes and redemption in New Zealand national identity claims. *Sociological Review*, 57(1), 145-162. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2008.01808.x

