Transcript: Intercultural Capability Teacher reflections

**The Island – Year 9 process drama activity**

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I think when I started this unit I was looking at it from an angle of teaching students about the benefits of multiculturalism, perhaps how important it is in a global community to have a sense of empathy and understanding of multicultural Australia.

I felt as I was proceeding through the unit that the students were effectively not engaged in... what does multiculturalism actually mean?

But more importantly, what are some of those dispositions and attitudes that can impact on or even allow for very divisive societies?

So I actually, being an English/drama teacher, dealing with the group of students that were I think quite keen to be more hands-on and interactive and active, used process drama as a means of unpacking where I was coming from.

Process drama is effectively where the end product of a large stage performance is not the result but you're actually teaching through the course of a particular text about how students can engage and reflect on the text that they are reading.

I used the text *The Island* by Armin Greder which is a well-known picture book about a refugee that lands on a particular... it's an unidentified country.

He is taken in reluctantly by the villagers. There is only one voice of reason within this particular village, a fisherman who states,"We must look after him. He needs our protection."

Over time, even though they lock him in a goat pen, rumours start to circulate that he eats with his hands, that he eats the bones of children, that he haunts their fears, their days, their nights, rumours about...even those that are meant to protect him, start to say he will probably kill us all in our sleep if he could.

So it's a really powerful text.

What I did is I read it to the students to begin and then I got them into the drama room and actually appointed them certain roles of the fishermen, the carter, the priest, the innkeeper.

And through the process of reading them sections of the story and saying, "OK, now I'd like you

to imagine this is your role, explain your role to the villagers and how you feel about this refugee arriving on your shores as you would imagine your character to have said."

I would read through the sections of the text, put the text down and have the students role-play other incidents.

For example, the man escapes, he comes back to the community, he wants something to eat.

How do we respond to that?

I got them to imagine that they were the newspaper reporters.

What headlines would they write in the papers?

I had them re-enact certain scenes from the text as the children dealing with this refugee.

What would they say?

Even thinking aloud about what was in their mind as they were interacting with others regarding this man who needed their protection but they chose not to give to him.

What I found about this is that the students really embraced this particular activity because it gave them that sense of empathy and an understanding of how our perceptions and peer pressure can influence how we behave and what we say.

It ended up being an incredibly powerful means because it gave some students an opportunity to slip into the steps of this man or into the steps of someone who through the text had shown their paranoia, their bigotry, their prejudice, and played that character.

I would then play the teachering role and say.....come in and make comments such as,

"The man has escaped. What's our view about this?"

And have the students interact with each other and show short scenes, basically unpacking the text as we read through it.

And at the end they had to imagine 20 years later there has been this anniversary of the eviction of the man from the island, they send him back on his raft out to the sea.

What would they be thinking?

Do they have any regrets about what they had done?

Would they be thinking then, "Was that a wise move to make?"

How was their island now? They built this incredible fortress around the island after they evicted him to effectively exclude anyone else from coming to the place.

I found it really powerful.

To me it was the most successful thing I did with intercultural capabilities, simply because it was interactive.

I even got them making small rafts and to music they had to move the raft over the oceans as though they were the refugee and have brief breakout scenes of what happened to him, why did he leave the country, and what kind of trauma he had experienced.

A really fantastic exercise.