

I grew up in NZ. On the 6th of February every year, we celebrate the Treaty of Waitangi with a public holiday. When I watched 'Sesame St' as a child, I didn't learn to count in Spanish, I learnt to count in Maori. I was taught Maori in school. I knew Maori songs and Maori folk stories.

When I moved to Australia in the early 90's to attend University in Perth, I was amazed that your country's Indigenous culture didn't seem to be recognized or integrated like the Maori culture had been at home. Your rich Aboriginal history didn't seem to be acknowledged and respected for all its beauty and wisdom.

My background is in the arts. I am a singer and an actress and a storyteller. A few years ago I was lucky enough to be flown to Broken Hill for a short film and I will never forget looking out the window of that tiny plane that I was in and thinking "shit! it looks just like the paintings!". As an artist, I was at that moment, totally in awe of the visionary way in which the stories and landscapes had been captured in some of the paintings I'd been lucky enough to see. Painted by people who have called this country home for thousands of years. Why hadn't some of my Australian friends told me about this? Wasn't the richness of their culture an integral part of their education?

I literally 'fell' into the wondrous world of Early Childhood Education. I applied for some casual work at UNSW's 'Tigger's Honey Pot' through a very dear friend, Jemma Carlisle, now the General Manager of Early Years at UNSW and 9 years later, I'm still there.

I am and have been extremely fortunate to be surrounded by caring, passionate & ever-questioning Educators and a very forward thinking Director and mentor Sylvia Turner. Our Centre's way is the only way I know. I have never worked in another Early Childhood setting and I really love my job. Sylvia has always told me that my best quality is really 'listening' to the children; hearing their voices and valuing what they have to say and valuing their understanding and interpretation of this crazy world we live in. Great qualities for a storyteller.

Fast forward to 2012. Some of our older children were invited over to the University for 'Sorry Day' celebrations. I didn't go, but in the staff room following the excursion, one of my colleagues who had gone was extremely frustrated by what had happened. The children had been invited to participate but had been excluded from parts of it on the grounds 'they might not understand' or 'they may be distracted'. In one of the speeches it was

then said that our children might hopefully “ go home and tell mum and dad about some Aboriginal dancing they had seen “.

Knowing how much we had already been talking with the children about ‘Sorry Day’ and Reconciliation and The Stolen Generation, using the book ‘The Rabbits’ by John Marsden and Shaun Tan as a visual starting point, I quietly walked out of the staff room and into Sylvia’s office and said “ you know those little films I’ve been wanting to make? About what we do here and how much the children learn and how much they understand? Let’s make one! ” So I did.

After it was made - and I thank my editor Scott Keanie for all his help - the film was ‘tested’ at a round table discussion at the University. My goal was to have the film shown on the UNSW website during NAIDOC week, to show our wider community how much the children know & what sort of learning is taking place now. It was seen by a cross section of academic & non-academic staff including the media dept. and staff from Nura Gili, the Indigenous studies unit at UNSW.

I listened to the feedback I was given. It was well-received and complimented but some comments made about this initial edit absolutely amazed me. How was it that this little film I had made could be perceived as using the children ‘politically’. I remember thinking how out-of-my-depth and naive I felt! Weren’t these issues real? Isn’t the true history of our country something that should be talked about and explained to everyone? What was happening in other centres? Then I remembered, “ that’s right, they’re too young to understand.” How could they possibly understand what it might be like to be taken away from their families?

As an Educator and as a mother, I wish that the next generation have so much true knowledge about our history, be it right or wrong, that it becomes intrinsic to them. I hope that they recognize violations of Human Rights when they see them, talk about them, act on them and learn from them. Perhaps wrong decisions are made. Perhaps apologies are given and accepted.

Hopefully from this, we can move on towards a greater understanding of both the richness and brutality of life that is right here in front of us, every single day. Surely this is the right of every child?