

## **Arts Practice as Method, Urban Spaces and Intra-Active Faiths**

**Assoc. Prof. Anna Hickey-Moody**

This presentation examines the research design for an arts based (Barone & Eisner 2011; McNiff 1998) interfaith research project that is intended to build relationships between children from different faiths and to increase research participants' understandings of faiths other than their own. The project is funded as an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship called Early Start Arts to Counter Radicalization and has a mixed method approach that brings arts based workshop groups for children together with focus groups for parents. Early findings demonstrate the utility of art for developing a sense of belonging and self-worth in children and clearly show ways in which art facilitates comment on complex social issues even from primary school age. The nature of such socially engaged arts based research means it must be developed or, at the least refined, through engagement with community and social context. As such, consideration of the urban environment that shapes the lives of the young research participants and their families' forms part of the discussion undertaken. Arts practice materializes the social in new ways, as a methodological transformation of affect theory, focusing on, activating and transforming emotional responses (Tomkins 1992 4: 7). The project is the first childhood and interfaith (Bunge 2006) project to operate from a framework that brings theories of affect (Tomkins 1992; Colman 2005; Murphie & Bertelsen 2010; Hickey-Moody 2009, 2012, 2013) to consider the creation of new forms of interethnic, interracial community and national belonging through art. This framework focuses on non-verbal, aesthetic and culturally coded forms of information exchange. Art making workshops maximize the potential for non-verbal of communication and allow for the observation of how interfaith young people relate to each other through body language, iconography, color's and gestures. The arts workshops generate innovative data sets that include images created by children, videos and photographs of interfaith children working together. These data sources offer invaluable insight into the embodied politics of art making and the interpersonal relationships that art making practices entail. Focus groups with the families of young participants, offer adult perspectives on public perceptions of minority faiths and also show the ways faith has sustained families thorough moves across the world and often across war torn lives. Through a new materialist lens, I will show that the art work created by this project is an intra-active idea of faith and becoming-together of different beliefs, effected through aesthetic practices.