**Michelle Tourbier, PhD Researcher, Durham University, UK**

Michelle Tourbier’sresearch interests include philosophy of education, democratic history, intercultural education, human rights, and the theories of Michèl Foucault. She grew up in Arizona, possesses a BA in political science (UofA), a Masters in International Law focussing on human rights (ANU) and a Masters in Education Research (Durham University). She has helped design curriculum and training for diverse contexts and ages in the US, Netherlands, Germany, Mexico, India and Cambodia. From 2016-2017, she helped coordinate an afterschool program for young refugees in Germany. She currently lives in Australia and will be delivering her session from there.

**Michelle Tourbier’s session: Creatively engaging with ‘hidden utopias’ (2.45 – 3.30pm Thursday 29th September)**

Democracy around the world is increasingly seen to be “in crisis”. This crisis is typically exemplified through growing distrust in democratic processes, distrust in traditional gatekeepers of knowledge, increased support for authoritarian solutions, suspicion of those who are culturally ‘other’, the troubling of truth, and rising populism. Consequently, educators and scholars are increasingly asked to respond to this crisis in innovative ways. Yet, doing so risks placing educators in the midst of these conflicts. The question is, might it be possible to engage with these conflicts in less abrasive ways while seeking to move beyond the intransigent paradigms of the present and generate imaginative futures? I propose that at the centre of these conflicts often lies a conflicting view over what constitutes ‘utopia’. I refer to these implicit, imagined worlds as ‘hidden utopias’ and submit that they have long played a vital role in the history of democratic culture.

Hidden utopias are the worlds we secretly wish for and the spaces we escape to in our private moments to seek refuge from the present. However, they can also harbour a darker side if not subjected to critique. This presentation explores practical ways in which the concept of ‘hidden utopias’ might be used to critically and creatively engage with the idea of ‘democratic culture’ in democratic and intercultural situations. As such, it aspires to help educators and learners re-think and re-imagine the possibilities of the present.