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## **Tertiary teaching and learning in Papua New Guinea – building effective intercultural learning and teaching relationships**

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### **Abstract**

Papua New Guinea is in the process of nation building. Integral to this national development is the building of a successful vernacular-based early years education program for children aged 6 to 8 years. The program is a new initiative in a country which formerly provided schooling only from the primary years and conducted in English. The system is being implemented by village-based elementary teachers supported by district trainers. These trainers require skills in early years education, with qualifications and expertise to match their various roles and responsibilities. The PNG Department of Education, in conjunction with AusAID, chose the early childhood program at the University of South Australia to upgrade the qualifications of 36 trainers to degree level. This was achieved using a two year, mixed-mode delivery, including four two week in-country intensives. From late 2002 to early 2004, early childhood lecturers traveled to meet their students in-country. In the aftermath, three lecturers and one student reflected on their experiences, both personal and professional, on teaching and learning in one of the most culturally diverse countries on earth. Six strategies for building reciprocal relationships in cross-cultural teaching and learning contexts are identified, with the key theme of the teacher as learner.

### **Introduction**

Having gained its independence in 1975, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Australia's nearest neighbour, is in the process of nation building. In a society that comprises more than 860 different cultural groups, each with its own distinct language, this is a complex and challenging task. Integral to PNG's nation building is the construction

of a successful vernacular-based education program for children in the first three years of school. The program, which supports the right of each child to begin school in their home language using a curriculum mutually determined by that community, is being implemented by village-based elementary teachers supported by district-based trainers. To build a strong and vibrant program, these trainers need to be skilled in early years education, with qualifications and expertise to match their role.

The PNG Department of Education, in conjunction with the Australian aid agency AusAID, selected the early childhood degree at the University of South Australia (UniSA) to assist a group of trainers to gain the necessary further qualifications and expertise. Rather than using the common model of overseas students coming to Australia for an extended period of study, in this upgrading project the early childhood degree program for PNG's elementary education trainers employed a two year, mixed-mode model, with workshops in-country. The model included four, two week in-country intensives. From mid 2002 to early 2004, UniSA early childhood lecturers met their PNG students in Madang on PNG's north coast.

Following completion of the Project, three lecturers and one student, reflected on their teaching and learning in one of the most culturally diverse countries on earth. Using Chan's (2004) notion of enquiry into narrative as a method for gaining understanding, excerpts from the diaries and plans of two of the lecturers, Virginia and Elizabeth, and a student, Daisy, have been used to illustrate the ideas presented in the paper. Thus, this is an intensely personal account of this Project.

### **Culture and relationships**

The early childhood award, the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, was developed in Adelaide (South Australia) for Australian students. The offering of the award to international cohorts of students such as the PNG cohort, provided lecturers with the opportunity to see their materials through 'new eyes'.

For effective learning and teaching, the development of shared understanding between teachers and learners is critical. When learners and teachers are from vastly different cultural groups, a primary way to develop shared understanding is to build relationships between both parties which allow both to be at the same time learners and teachers (Freire, 1986). To do this well, teachers need to engage in a process of self-transformation. Hoffman (1997 cited in Rogoff, 2003 p. 29) describes this process well, capturing the process employed with the PNG students. He calls for

...a mode of encounter that I call learning for self-transformation: that is, to place oneself and the other in a privileged space of learning, where the desire (is) not just to acquire 'information' or to 'represent,' but to recognise and welcome transformation in the inner self through the encounter. While Geertz claims it's not necessary (or even possible) to adopt the other's world view in order to understand it...I also think that authentic understanding must be grounded in the sense of genuine humility that being a learner requires; the sense that what's going on with the other has, perhaps, some lessons for me (p. 17).

Rogoff (2003) acknowledges that for many people, recognizing that there is no one right way to do things is difficult because we are so immersed in our culture, we see what we do as 'normal,' and it is often invisible to us. For the PNG students, engagement that involves learning 'what's going on with the other' is required frequently in their country as they interact and form professional relationships with countrymen and women from many very diverse cultural groups. In doing so, Papuan New Guineans keep in mind that what is considered normal in their own village may not be 'normal' for the person in front of them. Furthermore, since there is not a dominant or hegemonic cultural group in PNG that controls what is accepted or not accepted, each encounter requires negotiation and alertness on the part of both parties. Daisy made this point in her diary.

We take pride in our cultural heritage and want to share the experience with others around us. At the same time we also need to respect others and their cultures because theirs are different from ours. We accept each others cultures and leave space for them to experience theirs as well as ours in our multicultural society.

For the UniSA lecturers, the task of engaging with the PNG students to develop 'authentic understanding' was more challenging. Despite coming from a society which is multicultural, all three lecturers are from Australian's dominant cultural group, and were thus were accustomed to having their beliefs and practices accepted as 'normal.' The first task for lecturers in this Project was to recognize that they were products of a specific culture, and that what they do and think most easily is one perspective but not the only one. Hoffman's words are wise because they pinpoint the need to approach an intercultural relationship as a learner, that is, with care, consciousness, caution and humility, and openness to change.

### **Socio-cultural theory as a framework**

Socio-cultural theory offers a useful framework for thinking about cross-cultural teaching and learning contexts. This theory recognizes the intrinsic role of culture in the human development process. There is consensus amongst socio-cultural theorists that the development of individuals forms and is formed by "social and cultural-historical activities and practices" (Rogoff, 2003 p. 51). Rogoff argues that to propose that culture simply influences human development is inaccurate. Rather, people create their cultural processes and their culture creates them, a much more foundational and two-way process. Thus, middle-class Anglo-Australian lecturers have been formed by and have formed their cultural processes, just as Papua New Guineans, from a host of traditions and languages, have been formed and been informed by their cultural practices and beliefs. Comments by Daisy illustrate this point.

...I see myself in my cultural context, as I am who I am in my culture. This means the food I eat will tell of where I come from. The way I prepare the food will tell where I come from. The cultural Sing Sing, the traditional customs, the bilum that I carry my belongings or babies in will tell where I come from. The language spoken or the body tattoos are all part of my culture. My culture is written all over my life as a Papuan New Guinean.

Rogoff (2003) makes a further point about the evolving nature of culture. “Culture is not static: it is formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting material and symbolic tools provided by predecessors and in the process creating new ones” (p. 51).

In participating in this program, Papua New Guinean trainers were involved in a process of cultural change for themselves and their communities, working to improve the training they were offering trainee teachers across the twenty provinces of the country. Lecturers entering this context while carrying their own cultural practices and understandings could not assume a single learning pathway and destination for their students. They needed to acknowledge that both students and lecturers brought rich and varied contributions to the class, and that students needed to be able to choose what was appropriate to their contexts from a smorgasbord of program offerings.

Socio-cultural theory offers a tool for thinking about cultures in terms of the qualities that are fostered in children by adults. It contends that each cultural tradition fosters independence and interdependence in a unique pattern. Cultures that foster principally independence or autonomy are likely to place the needs and desires of the self before those of the group. In contrast, cultures that foster primarily interdependence prioritize the group’s needs above those of the individual, and a person’s sense of identity is not a major focus (Gonzalez-Mena, 1997; Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni & Maynard, 2003).

The lecturers needed to be aware that in the PNG context, cultural understandings were likely to differ regarding the prioritizing of independence and interdependence. In general terms, the students came from cultures where interdependence was given priority. As one student said, “In my culture, your life is as important to me as my own.” In contrast, the dominant Australian cultural developmental trajectory prioritises independence over interdependence.

### **Building common ground**

In the teaching and learning context of the Project, there was a need to build common ground between the Australian lecturers and the many Papua New Guinean cultures represented amongst the student group. From their frequent encounters with Australians in PNG, particularly through the AusAID-funded Elementary Teacher Education Project, elementary trainers developed strategies to manage such relationships. The same was not true for the lecturers. Given the responsibility to develop a teaching and learning relationship necessary for successful implementation of the Project, the task for lecturers was more challenging than the one they usually faced teaching at UniSA.

A reflection process underpinned the course of action selected to build ongoing lecturer-student relationships. The initial step was a three day orientation for all UniSA early childhood academic and professional staff. Staff were briefed about the Project, the PNG context and the elementary vernacular education program. Lecturers were encouraged to think about how they perceived themselves, others,

and their relationships with others, and what this might mean in the PNG teaching and learning context. Lecturers shared knowledge of PNG and its people. This orientation began both an ongoing informal dialogue among UniSA staff, as well as regular formal meetings to report on the Project's progress (and staff learning) over its life. Using these processes, for two years, the Project was in the forefront of UniSA early childhood lecturers' thinking.

To build the necessary working relationship, one that recognized and welcomed self-transformation for both teachers and students, six key strategies were employed. All are based principally on ideas expressed in Rogoff's (2003) *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Rogoff addressed her text to researchers conducting cross cultural research. However she also provided key ideas relevant to the cross-cultural teaching and learning context. The work of Paulo Freire (1986), which highlighted the dual roles of teacher as learner and learner as teacher, was another key reference point. The way in which the six strategies developed by the teaching team were employed in the Project is described as follows.

### ***1. Suspending judgment about the ways of others (Rogoff, 2003, p.85).***

Suspending judgment about the ways of others means that although lecturers needed to observe and listen in order to gather knowledge about their students, making value judgments was to be resisted. It did not mean that everything lecturers saw and heard was accepted. Rather lecturers acknowledged their lack of contextual knowledge, and worked to better understand the different funds of knowledge (Moll 1992) that students brought to class.

To illustrate, during the intensives the students were encouraged to develop vignettes as part of the teaching and learning process. Students were always very eager to present their vignettes, proud of their presentations and very competitive. Sometimes the room had an atmosphere more like a football ground than a university classroom, with presenters receiving shouts of encouragement and clapping from their own group. Students were critical of, and less attentive to, the presentations of other groups, seemingly indicating a lack of openness to learn from other students. Lecturers worried that these behaviours may not lead to the desired outcome of shared knowledge and joint meaning making. When the class left the room for breaks, however, individuals stayed back to copy content from the presentation materials of other groups then displayed on the walls of the room. Thus sharing of ideas between groups was achieved by a different pathway than politely attending to formal presentations, that is, a different means was used to achieve a similar goal (Rogoff, 2003).

A second example occurred in Virginia's class. A student spent most of the final day of classes shopping for farewell gifts for her lecturer. From Virginia's perspective it would have been better for the student to stay in class, to make best use of the teaching and learning opportunities offered. But, for this student and the class, the embarrassment resulting from not having gifts to present at the dinner on the last night of classes would have been worse. Suspending judgments also

involved ensuring that space was allowed for students to judge what was best in their context.

## ***2. Suspending judgment about our own ways (Rogoff, 2003, p.85).***

The suspension of judgment about our own ways means that seeing one's own way as the right and only way was also to be resisted. Elizabeth reflected that she had arrived in PNG with the perception that the relative material poverty of people disadvantaged them, and that Australians were fortunate in comparison. Over the week of the intensive there was for her a growing realisation that Papua New Guinean village life brings many advantages no longer evident in material-rich countries, including community, belongingness, and the support that a society fostering principally interdependence brings. She began to see that Australian society principally promotes the notion of the individual and ownership, rather than the group and communal belonging, and reflected on how this can weaken community ties and leave individuals solely responsible for themselves. She noticed that Papua New Guinean village life is more respectful of the environment than her home country, and that people access what they need without taking more. The environment is there to be used in a sustainable way, not to be exploited for gain.

In another example, Virginia was astonished at the farewell dinner when the student giving the thank-you speech asked her to convey thanks to each of her immediate family members by name for sharing her with them. Never previously in her professional life had the sacrifices made by her family for her work been voiced so directly. The PNG students saw her as a family member and part of a community as well as their lecturer, a perspective from an interdependent view of the world that had never been acknowledged to her in any Australian workplace.

## ***3. Allowing for more than one perspective (Rogoff, 2003), listening to and observing students, and using that knowledge in interactions.***

Rogoff (2003, p. 24) presents the idea of the 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives on any situation, and the need for both if deeper communication and understanding are to develop between individuals of different cultures. The lecturers, as 'outsiders' in PNG, employed a range of strategies to develop their understanding of their students. Wanting to be able to hear the 'insider' perspective and use it in their teaching, lecturers initiated the building of a relationship with each student during the intensives. This relationship was the foundation of teaching and learning. Prior to the beginning of classes, lecturers arranged to meet students informally and individually at the student accommodation in Madang. Introductions included something about each student's community as well as customary names. During the intensives lecturers also joined the students informally whenever possible and many students took the opportunity to talk with the lecturers, providing further opportunities for the interchange of insider and outsider perspectives.

Providing a context in which lecturers could listen effectively to students was critical to the success of the Project. It was decided to locate the intensives in

Madang, a decision made for reasons principally to do with resources, safety and logistics, however for other reasons, the location became a strength of the Project. The students were learning in a relatively familiar place, one in which they felt personally secure and comfortable, staying in the same accommodation as their cohort and study group.

Locating the Project intensives in-country gave the early childhood lecturers the opportunity to move outside their known area and work in the students' context. Most universities prefer international students to study in Australia, a preference born out of fiscal and logistic reasoning. Upon reflection, it is clear that even if this cohort had been able to come to Adelaide to study, the strain of operating in a new country with very different cultural processes would have been great, and likely reduced the number of overall graduates. Furthermore, lecturers would have been working in their own 'safety zone,' they would not have had around them the contextual information that allowed cultural understandings and links to develop. They would not have had the rich personal and professional experience of being in PNG, an experience which forced them to become learners, to see themselves as cultural expressions, and to challenge all that in Australia can be so easily assumed. Conducting the Project intensives in Madang may have also in some ways equalized the balance of power, students secure in their territory yet in the role of learners, lecturers in a challenging context counterbalanced by the status and power that comes with their job.

Common to all PNG cultures is the importance of belonging to a village, to a *wantok* (one language) group and to a geographical region. In societies where interdependence is primarily fostered, individual identity is less of a concern than of relatedness within the group, and social obligations and responsibilities (Greenfield et al, 2003): that is, not 'me' but 'we.' Student Daisy wrote;

In most of our (PNG) cultures we do most work, meetings in church or government organizations, in groups. Being in a group helps us to work as a team, thinking and doing things together. Our place of belonging gives us a sense of security, of knowing that I am not alone but I have a group to seek if the way is difficult.

In their usual teaching context the lecturers commonly make direct eye contact with students. However with the Papua New Guinean cohort they noticed some male students did not make direct eye contact with them, but rather lowered their gaze. Lecturers noted this response and found it less awkward to interact side by side with students to avoid the awkwardness of direct eye contact.

Attentive listening was critical to effective teaching and learning. When students spoke, lecturers listened carefully, even when what they were saying at first appeared tangential, as the content showed what students understood and how they had reached that understanding. Careful listening to the content of students' writing was also important. In her course Elizabeth asked students to write an individual daily reflective journal which was submitted at the end of each day. She responded every evening. In these journals students were encouraged to reflect on what they had learned that day. The intention of this requirement was to reinforce students' understanding, and to track students' daily development in the course. However the

daily reflective journal had other benefits. The journal deepened Elizabeth's relationship with and knowledge of each student because it expressed the 'insider' voice.

The student-led beginning to each day also gave lecturers insight into their students. It began with one student leading all in prayer and then the group singing the national anthem. Individual students also made announcements to their peers in Pidgin (one of the national languages of PNG). Lecturers learnt that this introduction to the day is an important part of developing a shared national identity and part of PNG's larger nation-building project.

As well as attentive listening and observing, there was also a need for lecturers to observe the physical characteristics of the country – the natural environment (tropical, mountainous, watery, lush), the low level of infrastructure and daily living conditions of most people (roads sometimes impassable due to floods and other weather events, and public transport breakdown), and the meaning of this for the students. The physical terrain makes communications and travel in PNG difficult, and some students came late to one intensive because a plane did not land on the island where it was expected requiring them to wait until the next day to travel to Madang. Course materials were soaked during a rough boat ride, lost on a bus and damaged in other ways as students traveled through the country. Many students had difficulty writing papers at night after work due to no electric lighting. Submitting papers was a challenge for some due to infrequent, distant and unreliable postal services. Almost all papers were submitted handwritten. Lecturers needed to accommodate these factors in their decisions about assignment presentation and deadlines.

During the intensives lecturers saw how individual students gravitated towards some students in the cohort, but not others, and how within boundaries dictated by size, students chose their own study groups. The concern commonly experienced in Australian university classes that handing this decision to students would result in some students being isolated was not an issue. Islander women from Bougainville, Manus and West New Britain worked together. Students from the Sandaun area grouped together in a team; as did Highlanders, and those located in Port Moresby. To provide the optimum learning and teaching context lecturers needed to allow students to select the members of their study group.

Lecturers noticed that when communicating students inserted into their contributions constant references to their own province - Chimbu, East New Britain, Sandaun, Manus, New Ireland or Bougainville. This information was helpful to the lecturers in getting to know more about the student, however it was not done specifically to educate lecturers about Papua New Guinean geography. Rather, it conveyed the message that for these students, place is intrinsic to being, in a way that many people of European-origin do not understand.

Hearing students often speak about their communities and provinces told lecturers of the importance of place, so in turn lecturers used place in their teaching. For example, lecturers asked students to enact common situations from their villages



to illustrate theoretical constructs. Place also became the focus of group work. When setting expectations regarding what was to be achieved in groups, lecturers asked groups to provide a name for ease of identification. The *Giaman* group hand-drew a map of Papua New Guinea for Virginia and Elizabeth, and every student wrote their name and the name of their village or region on that map, a wonderful resource for each lecturer. Although study groups are also used with the Australian and Singaporean early childhood education cohorts, the naming group idea does not engage these students in the same way. The socio-cultural notion of human development in one cultural group as being located on one point on the independence- interdependence continuum may explain the different responses from this student cohort.

Associated with the importance of place was the pride that the students had in their belongingness, which transferred into the group work and the very evident competition between the groups. In this context, it was important for the lecturers to ensure that all groups understood well what was required and they were supported to make the best presentation they could for the usual reasons, but also because of the need to preserve face in such a public situation. The heavy, immovable furniture in the teaching room made group work and movement around the room difficult, nevertheless lecturers circulated constantly during group work so students could quietly ask for assistance and clarification and then ‘put their best foot forward’ when they presented.

Attending to students and the Papua New Guinean environment gave lecturers insight into the student insider perspective, thus deepening their understanding of who they were actually teaching. Close attending to students’ responses to their course content and pedagogy gave lecturers the opportunity to assess how well they were building shared meaning with students, and make any appropriate changes.

#### ***4. Imagining and employing an outsider’s perspective (Rogoff, 2003) when preparing and presenting course content: finding pedagogies to better convey meaning.***

When the lecturers revised their materials with the Project in mind, they re-thought examples and removed Australian-specific cultural references; context-specific educational terminology and references to particular cultural artifacts like well-known toys. As well as providing each student with their own text, course information, study guide and readings books, lecturers also, as mentioned previously, scheduled considerable class time each day for the groups of students to integrate the content with their lives, followed by a presentation of the findings by each group. This structure allowed constant checking for understanding. A considerable amount of class learning time was also given to the preparation of the major assignment in the course.

The following diary extract describes how Virginia managed the teaching and learning encounter to better convey meaning. She imagined her material from an outsider perspective and tried to remove cultural assumptions or make them overt.

Before I left Australia, I prepared a manual for students outlining in detail what was to happen over each day of my course for the week. Included were readings, student group activities accompanied by focus questions and time for presentations, mini lectures, homework and other course details, with approximate time frames for each. From a socio-cultural perspective, these materials are cultural tools.

The use of a manual carried the risk of setting too firmly what was to occur, without allowing for flexibility and the requirements of this unknown student group. On the other hand, it gave students explicit written information about each of the five days: it allowed students time to think about the course content, and to prepare for subsequent sessions the following day. I tried to include flexibility into the manual's structure so that it did not need to be rigidly adhered to. If I could see that a planned activity or approach in the manual was not going to work, I adapted or replaced it. Later, some of the students reported that they had found the manual very useful and were now using their own version for in-service sessions with their trainee elementary teachers.

Each study group was asked to write theoretical principle statements with accompanying illustrative anecdotes in the evenings, and then bring that work to class for presentation and comment the next morning. All presentation materials, including homework and assignment preparation, were attached to the walls of the teaching room, so all students had access to the products of all groups while the course was being taught, and would not miss key content, as it was always accessible, building over the week.

Another strategy to improve meaning making was the use of video. I selected video excerpts to help explain key constructs, to communicate in another mode. This strategy carried the risk that showing videos from European contexts gives prominence to culturally inappropriate practice. However this risk must be weighed against the advantage of explicitness offered by the video medium. Students were very interested in the video material, were keen to interrogate what they had seen, and requested copies to use in their own training.

### ***5. Avoiding the 'One Best Way' approach (Rogoff, 2003, p.12) – encouraging critical consideration of the key course ideas in the Papua New Guinean context.***

Rogoff (2003) argues that dominant groups in a society often have the view that there is 'One Best Way' to think and act, the way of that dominant group. In colonized societies this Way has usually been imposed from above for the so-called 'betterment' of minority group peoples. In the post-colonial relationship between Australia and PNG, the presentation of course content from a Eurocentric perspective risks perpetuating the assumptions inherent in a One Best Way approach. So in this Project the role of lecturers was to give space for and voice to both Papua New Guinean and Australian ways of thinking about early childhood education. In their teaching, lecturers wanted students to consider their own practices and beliefs in relation to the theories and ideas in focus, and to contest what was being presented to build a uniquely PNG early childhood vision. The Project needed to resist the "banking concept of education" identified by Freire (1986 p. 58). Defining the banking concept, Freire wrote, "...knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 58).

Freire argued that for education to be effective, teachers must instead see themselves as learners, and learners see themselves as teachers, changing the teacher-student polarity. This notion is consistent with the socio-cultural view of learning and development as dynamic, as a process, rather than a static thing. Freire (1986) considered that students from a particular community need to draw on theoretical and local knowledge bases, to bring theory and their local knowledge together. Teachers have a key role in facilitating this process. Thus, in the PNG project the following practices were implemented:

- Students were asked to consider whether the theories and approaches being presented were relevant to their situation and if so in what way. They were also given a choice in their assignments about the theory they would use as a basis for their paper.
- As theoretical constructs were introduced, students were invited to present illustrations of these constructs from Papua New Guinean village life. To do this, they told stories, set up pretend market stalls, enacted fishing and hunting expeditions, gardening and household activities like cooking and weaving, made models and shared anecdotes about children in their communities. Students' anecdotes brought the lives of elementary-aged village children to the class.

There were many rich and memorable examples. To illustrate Piaget's construct of adaptation, one group recounted an anecdote about a six year old child from the Highlands. The child was on his first visit to a coastal beach, playing with others a well-known game called Tassi Tassi. He felt thirsty and ran to the sea to quench his thirst as he would to a river in his village. When he tasted the salt water he exclaimed 'Aarrgh,' and spat it out. He now understood that water could be salty, thus broadening his concept of water. Such illustrations were also a key ingredient of assignments. To illustrate the socio-cultural principle that cognitive development is cultural, one student wrote in his paper about a four year old girl who put her hand in her grandfather's basket, and was severely punished as touching this basket is forbidden to girls.

- Where possible, employment of cultural tools familiar to students was also critical. Using socio-cultural theory, Rogoff (2003) highlighted the role of cultural tools in human development. Cultural tools are the ways of thinking of a culture, expressed symbolically in language and in action, which allow participants in that culture to achieve culturally specific goals. Rogoff (2003) states "thinking involves learning to use symbolic and material cultural tools in ways that are specific to their use" (p. 50).

Participants used their tools in group situations. The cultural tools brought by students and staff to the Project differed significantly. One of the tasks of the lecturers was to introduce the students to the cultural tools of Academe needed for university study. The lecturers' task was to use pedagogy that enabled the students' to employ their own cultural tools to

study. From the lecturers' cultural perspective, the students were excellent storytellers, which was very evident in the high quality of their anecdotes in class and in assignment work.

Comprehension of theoretical ideas from a European global perspective was more challenging however. The previously described strategy of having students work in self-selected groups so that they had the support of other cohort members was critical to their learning. Students used these study groups both in class and at night when they prepared materials for classes the next day. Giving significant time over to group work with culturally comfortable peers indicated recognition of the need for support when working in a third, fourth or fifth language.

The Western cultural academic tools presented were seen by the students as useful in ways that surprised their lecturers. For example, in part of Virginia's course on theoretical approaches to thinking, several students wrote that the strategies were very useful to elementary teaching in PNG because they would develop specific skills in children who would need to negotiate with multi-national companies seeking to mine and log on their communal lands. The development of capacity in young PNG citizens to deal with foreign companies was clearly a major issue for these students.

In the latter example, students saw their enrolment in this early childhood degree as an opportunity to improve and advance their communities. They wanted to learn about new ways of educating elementary-aged children, with the goal of strengthening their communities (Rogoff, 2003). In contrast, Australian dominant views on education see university-level education as offering self-improvement and personal advancement, with community benefits a lesser focus. This is an example of Rogoff's (2003) notion of the same means used by two cultures to achieve different ends. In this Project, the inclusion and valuing of multiple ways and perspectives rather than the presentation of a One Best Way resulted in greater course relevance.

***6. Acknowledging that education can be a colonial tool (Rogoff, 2003 p. 344), that is, the impact of the Project may not be entirely positive***

Lecturing staff recognized that the teaching the early childhood program to Papua New Guinean elementary trainers was an intervention that carried a risk. As lecturers bringing theoretical frameworks developed in hegemonic European cultural contexts, they were capable of disrupting cultural practices (Rogoff, 2003, p. 354). Given the relative economic and social power balance between PNG and Australia, and the colonial legacy (which meant understanding that they were working in a postcolonial context), this was a matter of particular concern. Much of the Australian-PNG colonial and aid history informs current relations, with the colonizing culture's position reinforced. There was a risk that students may adopt a less critical attitude to content presented by lecturers who they may perceive to be

superior, more expert, better in some way. This situation had the potential to result in the adoption of culturally inappropriate educational theory and practices.

For example, Piaget's theory allows for one developmental path for cognition, with logical, abstract hypothetical thinking as the highest form. There may be local village notions about the development of children's thinking which do not have the status and power of Piaget's theory. As a result, students may begin to see local perspectives about the development of children's cognition as less important and perhaps inferior (Christie 1992). To quote Becher (2004), "If we do not make cultural differences or cultural capital relevant in the classroom, we actually stimulate the hegemonic cultural power of the majority" (p. 90).

Thus, it was critical for lecturers to explicitly describe the context in which theoretical frameworks presented were initially developed, and to state that theory is always informed by power relations, by context and social and historical factors (Walkerdine, 1992). Walkerdine argues that thinking is "a socially and historically produced practice, not an abstract and disembodied entity" (p.10).

In addition, the lecturers provided a range of theoretical perspectives giving a range of visions of development. They also included class tasks that asked students to assess the usefulness of the theory to their Papua New Guinean contexts.

The showing of a video illustrated how a particular set of power relations can be conveyed inadvertently by choice of teaching materials. When Virginia showed a popular American-made video on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, she was alarmed to see one or two minutes of early 20th century footage depicting everyday life on Manus Island (PNG) taken by Margaret Mead and her colleague Laura Forsyth. Immediately she saw the material from an outsider's perspective. In deciding to include the video in her class presentation she had overlooked this section. The footage presented the Manus Islanders as 'other' and childlike, not 'us.' The presence of Manus Islanders in class told Virginia that she could no longer overlook the colonial tone of this footage and what it was still communicating about who is 'us' and who is 'them,' and the structure of power relations.

Giving students the opportunity to choose course content relevant to their own contexts, presenting theories located in their historical and social contexts rather than as universal truths, including explicit discussion of cultural differences, and removing content containing colonial assumptions all contributed to the Project making a positive contribution to early childhood education in Papua New Guinea.

## **Conclusion**

To be effective, lecturers teaching in international cross-cultural programs need to see themselves as learners as well as teachers, and their students as teachers as well as learners. Using the ideas of Barbara Rogoff (2003), six broad strategies which strengthened one intercultural teaching and learning context have been identified and described. In the PNG Project lecturers found that they needed to temporarily suspend judgment about both students' and their own ways, and to create an

intercultural space where understanding was the goal rather than judgment. Under these conditions lecturers could attend to their students, and build relationships which allowed authentic intercultural dialogue. Insider and outsider perspectives were given voice as both were seen to contribute to effective teaching and learning. The idea that there is One Best Way (Rogoff, 2003) was avoided. Lecturers were aware that education can be a colonizing tool, so they attended to power relations in their teaching and learning. This focus enhanced the immediate teaching situation, while also modeling the effective management of power inequities to students who were teacher trainers.

In a world riven with intercultural conflict, an idea expressed by one student bears repeating. It concerns the essential reciprocity required in intercultural teaching and learning, and perhaps also in the world beyond the classroom. He said, "In my culture your life is as important to me as my own." This is an idea that could take us all forward, as world citizens.

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