AN EXPLORATION OF AN AUSTRALIAN TEACHER EDUCATOR WORKING WITH A GROUP OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS FROM TIMOR LESTE TO DEVELOP THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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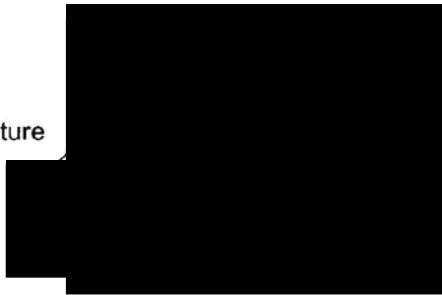
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ABSTRACT

This study researches the coming together of difference in an educational setting between an Australian teacher and students from Timor Leste (TL). In 2012/13, on behalf of my university, I delivered a Graduate Certificate in Vocational Education and Training to a group of twelve Technical and Vocational Education and Training professionals from TL. TL is classified by the United Nations as a least developed nation. It has a history of invasion and turmoil. I travelled to TL initially to meet the students and gain an understanding of their vocational education system. The twelve students then travelled to Melbourne for three months to study on campus, and I returned to TL nine months later for their final assessment. The interaction between these students and me as their teacher is the subject of my PhD research, which seeks to understand the impact of cultural difference on the teacher-student relationship. I conducted a two part study, firstly from the perspective of myself as an Australian teacher (autoethnography) and secondly from the perspective of the students from a least developed nation (case study). My autoethnography highlights fifteen existential crises in my cultural adaptation using a six step framework which I have labelled a structured vignette analysis. The result is a rich, unfolding journey of a teacher enlightened by her encounters with a culture different from her own. The case study of the students was conducted through a focus group followed by four individual interviews. The students' previous experience of a collectivist culture and a teacher centred pedagogy produced shock, confusion and anxiety when confronted with a culture different from their own. Their journey towards adapting to an individualist culture and student centred pedagogy produced data from which all teachers of international students could benefit.

STUDENT DECLARATION

"I, Jayne Pitard, declare that the PhD thesis entitled, 'An exploration of an Australian teacher educator working with a group of vocational education professionals from Timor Leste to develop their knowledge and practice in vocational education' is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

Signature

Date   07 − 12 − 2016

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS, CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND AWARDS

Publications

Pitard, J. (2016). Using vignettes within autoethnography to explore layers of cross-cultural awareness as a teacher. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 17(1). Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2393

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Awards

Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (2010). Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia.

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KEY TO TRANSCRIPTS

Pseudonyms   All names used for students are pseudonyms.

Direct quotations   Direct quotations from the literature are indented if they are more than
                      two lines in length.   If they are less than two lines in length they are
                      presented in text in quotation marks.

                      Direct quotations from student data are presented indented and in
                      italics, unless the quote is in text in which case it is in italics and in
                      quotation marks.

ABBREVIATIONS

TVET   Technical and Vocational Education and Training – as it is called in TL

VET   Vocational Education and Training – as it is called in Australia

GCVET   Graduate Certificate in Vocational Education and Training – A graduate
                certificate at Level 8 on the Australian Qualifications Framework

AQF   Australian Qualifications Framework - A national system
                of qualifications encompassing all post-compulsory education

UN   United Nations – an intergovernmental organisation to promote international co-
                operation

TL   Timor Leste – The Democratic Republic of Timor Leste with a population of
                1.78 million

DIT   Dili Institute of Technology

INDMO   National Labour Force Development Institute

SEPFOPE   Secretariat of State for Vocational Training Policy and Employment

CHAPTER 1:   INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Over twelve months on behalf of my university in Melbourne, Australia I delivered a Graduate Certificate in Vocational Education and Training (GCVET) to a group of twelve Timorese technical and vocational education and training (TVET) professionals. In 2012 I travelled to Timor Leste (TL) initially to meet the students and gain an understanding of the TVET system in TL. The twelve students travelled to Melbourne for three months study on campus, and completed their qualification through implementation of a major project in TL. I returned to TL nine months later for their final assessment. The interface between these students and me as their teacher is the subject of my research in which I seek to understand the impact of cultural difference on the teacher-student relationship. I conducted a two part study, firstly from the perspective of myself as the teacher (autoethnography) and secondly from the perspective of the students (case study). At its core, my research is motivated by an interest in understanding how I responded to the cultural challenges of working with a group of Timorese students, and how these students responded to learning in another culture. Phenomenology presented itself as a harmonious methodology to study my experience, and the lure of speaking from my heart about the lived experience, through the use of vignettes within autoethnography as a method, was compelling (Pitard, 2016). Autoethnography is a contentious qualitative research methodology which speaks with emotion about existential experiences (Anderson, 2006; Denzin, 2006; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). It allows scholars to focus on "ways of producing meaningful, accessible and evocative research grounded in personal experience" (Ellis et al., 2011 [3]). Autoethnography is self-focused and context-conscious (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010; Reed-Danahay, 1997). It is a constructive method for researching the teacher-student relationship where the teacher and the students are from diverse cultures and different economic backgrounds (Pitard, 2016). It allows an in-depth exploration of the researcher as teacher. As such, I am a participant as well as the researcher in Part 1 of my research. The use of case study as a method in Part 2 of my research placed the focus on the students, and allowed them to tell their story of studying in Australia through a focus group and four individual interviews. It allowed the use of multiple sources of evidence, such as researcher observation and journal entries over an extended period, and student artefacts such as mind maps and assessment submissions, to support recollections of their experiences.

The students ranged in age from 27 to 58 years, and comprised three females and nine males. They were selected by the Secretary of State in TL in conjunction with the Education Attaché to the TL Embassy in Australia. Eight of the students worked as managers in training organisations, and four worked in areas of government policy development and implementation. The history of TL has been turbulent, especially after the invasion by Indonesia in 1975. The resultant fight for independence by the Timorese and eventual withdrawal by Indonesia in 1999, resulted in 25% of the population being displaced or killed and most of the infrastructure in TL

being destroyed. Consequently, training organisations in TL have not been historically mandatorily registered but often were created by different charity or religious groups as the need arose. A process has now commenced where standards have been developed and must be achieved prior to attaining national registration as a training organisation in TL. A National Qualifications Framework is also being developed to inform the provision of vocational education in TL. The University where I have been teaching for 25 years has developed a strong partnership with TL and continues to strengthen this partnership through ongoing student exchange. In its Strategic Plan, the university emphasizes its commitment to develop a distinctive specialisation in knowledge exchange with TL (The University Strategic Plan, 2011, pp. 5, 9, 14). In pursuit of this knowledge exchange, the university received funding from the Victorian State Government to professionally develop a group of twelve TVET professionals from selected educational facilities and government departments throughout TL. These TVET professionals came to Australia for twelve weeks from July to September 2012 to undertake the GCVET. Their major assessment was to develop and complete a project to implement on their return to TL, at which stage I travelled again to TL to assess their projects. It took twelve months of planning before the students landed in Melbourne and during this planning I applied to undertake the research reported in this thesis. Ethics application HRE12-310 with Victoria University was granted in 2012 before the students came to Australia.

1.2   AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION

In Part 1 of my research, I explore my reflexivity to issues of culture, language, communication, learning, study and activities of daily living whilst teaching these students. At all times I have been mindful of my position as an authority figure in my role as teacher. I undertook Part 2 of my research once the students had completed the GCVET and their results were recorded. I used a focus group and four interviews to explore how these students adapted to study in Australia, and their experiences implementing what they studied in the program on their return to TL. At its core, my research is motivated by an interest in understanding how I, as their teacher, responded to the cultural challenges of working with a group of students from a 'least developed country', and how these students responded to learning in a culture much different from their own. The United Nations (UN) has criteria for defining least developed countries among which are gross national income per capita, instability of agriculture production, instability of exports of goods and services, share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in GDP, under five mortality rate, adult literacy rates, secondary school enrolment ratio, percentage of population undernourished, and victims of war or invasion (United Nations Development Policy and Analysis Division, 2015). The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2014, p. 2) website states:

> Over two thirds of Timorese still live below US$2 a day. The country's mainly subsistence-based agriculture sector struggles with low productivity and limited access to markets. The private sector is small and weak. Businesses face considerable obstacles, including difficulties accessing finance, a low-skilled workforce and poor infrastructure. The maternal mortality rate is the highest in the region, while school enrolment has improved, but the quality of education remains poor. Women face significant barriers in accessing education and

employment and high rates of domestic violence. And nutrition remains a major concern: 50 per cent of children under five years have stunting—one of the highest rates in the world.

The purpose of this research does not include an analysis of TL's economy but these data are provided as an explanation of TL being included in UN and International Monetary Fund data as a least developed country. My past experience of such cultures had been as a tourist, and I had little experience of forming ongoing relationships with people from least developed countries. The career paths and educational backgrounds of this group of Timorese VET professionals was less clearly defined than for other groups with whom I have worked. I have confidence in my knowledge of accredited qualifications in Australia using the Australian Qualifications Framework as my guide, but I was not familiar with the academic standard of the qualifications held by some TL students, or the methods of teaching and assessment they had experienced in the past. Equally, many of the students had little or no experience of living outside TL and were mostly unfamiliar with academic requirements in Australia, our method of teaching and assessment or the distinctions of our culture. This coming together of innocence had much to say but in this thesis I will concentrate on my use of autoethnography as a phenomenological tool to explore shifts in my cultural adaptation, and case study method to explore how the students adapted to studying in Australia.

1.3   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This research is significant in many ways. TL is an emerging nation following the declaration of independence in 2002. It is a country devastated by invasion and destruction. There is much work to be done in assisting TL to rebuild infrastructure and skills. An important aspect of this rebuilding is re-instating education as a fundamental right of all citizens. My research highlights ways of assisting TVET professionals in TL to shape this infrastructure through deepening their understanding of what has already been achieved in TL, how to move forward in strengthening the systems which are currently in a fledgling state, and highlights the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of systems. The students progress from seeing individual responses in TVET, to seeing the system as a whole. The findings from my research may assist others to recognise the impact of both cultural adaptation and an unfamiliar educations system and alien pedagogic approach on both students from least developed nations and teachers from developed countries, and to cater for these differences in their preparation and reflexivity while teaching and learning. Secondly, my use of autoethnography as a method for exploring my own cultural adaptation resulted in the development of a framework to assist vignette analysis (discussed in Chapter 3.4.1). While my autoethnography is a story about me as a first time teacher of international students and in particular this group of students, I have produced within my vignettes not just a story of a single incident as an anecdote but have located this anecdote within a broad framework which future researchers could utilise in their research process (Pitard, 2016). In addition, my autoethnography exposes strategies I developed to overcome the differences between myself and the students, and the learning shock they experienced in transitioning to a student centred pedagogy.

1.4   STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

At the commencement of teaching in TL I had limited experience with international education and little contact with students from a least developed country. As a teacher educator within the university I had delivered the GCVET as a professional development program to university teaching staff, as well as to VET teachers external to the university. The Timorese students were a very different group from my previous students and their career paths and educational backgrounds were not familiar to me. On my initial visit to TL I had a meeting with the Minister for Education and I asked him what his expectations were for this group of students. He replied that the expectation of the Government of TL was that these students, who had been carefully selected by the Government of TL, would develop their knowledge of the VET system, strengthen their English language skills and gain a qualification. As such they were a privileged group of TVET professionals on whom the Government of TL was placing an expectation for developing the TVET system and infrastructure in TL. My role was to deliver the GCVET to these students to achieve these outcomes. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a national system of qualifications with ten levels encompassing all post-compulsory education from Certificate 1 through to PhD. The GCVET was at Level 8 on the AQF beneath Masters (Level 9) and PhD (Level 10). The level of knowledge and skills expected at Level 8 in the AQF 2015, is demanding and includes advanced theoretical and technical knowledge, plus advanced cognitive and communication skills to critically analyse, evaluate and transform information to produce solutions to complex problems. The educational experience of the Timorese students had been based in teacher centred learning where the students were passive learners and the teacher was an authority figure not to be questioned. AQF Level 8 requires students to demonstrate autonomy and highly developed critical thinking skills, none of which the students had previously encountered.

In addition to the students' lack of experience of an autonomous learning environment, I had limited experience teaching students with English as a second language or, as in the case of the TL students, where English was their third language. I speak no Tetun (a Timorese native language), Bahasa or Portuguese. Also I had little experience teaching students from a least developed country, especially one recently traumatised by invasion and destruction. I did however have much experience in teaching transformational learning to teachers and extensive practice in seeing myself through others (I expand on this in Chapter 3). My 25 years of teaching and ongoing study were well tested as I, like the students, was confronted by dealing with a culture different from my own.

In seeking to learn from others, I undertook an internet search for data from those who had worked with TL students. Some teacher experiences from around the time of independence in TL (2001-2002) were helpful in understanding the context of TL but I found little to guide me in preparing to teach these students, and little to guide the students on what to expect from their Australian experience. My intention for this research is to add to the body of knowledge on both teaching students from a least developed country and identifying what the students found difficult about learning in Australia. My research question is grounded in understanding the experience of both the teacher and the students in their cultural adaptation.

1.5   RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the experiences and understandings of both teachers and students in drawing together educators from developed countries and students from least developed country settings, where the program is conducted in a developed county setting with the intention that learnings from it be implemented in a least developed country setting?

PART 1 – THE TEACHER

What happens when an educator from a developed country, in her own environment, is drawn together with students in an environment new to them?

What particular strategies did the educator develop to assist her to deal with difference?

What teaching strategies did the educator develop to assist her to move from understanding and applying, through to analysing, evaluating and creating, and working together effectively?

PART 2 – THE STUDENTS

What practices did students develop to cater for the cultural differences they experienced in the program?

How was the relationship with the students perceived to be fostered by the Australian teacher educator?

How did the students adapt to learning in a new environment? What coping strategies did they develop to enhance their learning potential?

How did the students adapt to communication techniques used? How did the students cope with the interaction required for group and independent learning?

What plans did the students develop for implementation on return to TL of what they learned in the program?

1.6   STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis has seven chapters. This first chapter includes an introduction to the study and the two methods used to explore the cultural adaptation of both the teacher and the students. It provides background information on the project undertaken on behalf of the university, the research questions, a statement of the issue, a list of definitions and gives an outline of the significance of the study. Chapter Two puts the study into context by introducing the students and providing a short history of the culture of TL. The literature on differences in cultural dimensions is addressed as an explanation for the experience of culture shock. Chapter Three addresses both my epistemological and ontological approaches and explains the researcher lenses of autoethnography and case study, through which I explore my cultural adaptation and that of the students. My positionality as the researcher is explored at length and references to the literature are undertaken at every stage. In Chapter Four I provide a profile of each student including their level of education and English proficiency. This provides a deepening context for

the reader. Chapter Five is devoted to exploring the cultural adaptation of the teacher (myself) through structured vignette analyses in my autoethnography. In Chapter Six I present data from the focus group and individual interviews in the case study and conduct a discussion and analysis of that data. Finally Chapter Seven provides findings and discussion of recommendations for future instances of teachers from developed countries interfacing with students from least developed countries. The limitations of my research are also identified and discussed.

CHAPTER 2: THE STUDY IN CONTEXT

2.1   INTRODUCTION

This is a study of a teacher from Australia, a developed country, teaching a group of students from TL, a least developed country. The building of the teacher-student relationship in the face of cultural difference is explored through the use of autoethnography (teacher) and case study (students). To put the study into context, in this chapter I consult the literature to explore the differences between the cultures of Australia and TL and to elucidate the perceived differences in communication in both cultures. Anthropologist, Edward T. Hall (1983) identifies differences in cultures which he explains as high context and low context. People from high context cultures employ coded messages to convey information and are more influenced by situational cues such as facial expressions and context, whereas people from low context cultures transmit information directly and rely heavily on verbal and written communication. Later in this chapter I explain why I believe TL can be identified as a high context culture and Australia as a low context culture. Having identified the differences in the two cultures, I then address the issue of the TL students as international students studying in Australia. I explain how they differ from most groups of international students because of the circumstances of their sojourn in Australia. In identifying myself (the teacher) as from a low context culture, I explain my approach to my teaching as intuitive, open to understanding beyond what can be seen through actions and the spoken word. I have undertaken study and deep personal examination to identify my attitudes to life and the assumptions I have accumulated over the years which contribute to my attitudes. Even so, such attempts at lowering the difference in high context/low context cultures cannot prepare people for the diversity of life experience between a nation which has experienced peace and a nation with a background of conflict. It is extremely important to recognise that this study is not simply an examination of the relationship between students and a teacher from high and low context cultures. This is an examination of students from a high context culture who have experienced the trauma of invasion, cruelty, death, destruction and poverty, whose cultural identity has been compromised, coming together with a teacher from a low context, stable, wealthy (in relative terms), culturally identifiable, developed country.

2.2   WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture has been defined in many ways by anthropologists over the years and in 1952 Kroeber and Kluckhohn identified over 164 different definitions collected up until 1951 (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). However there appears to be a common premise amongst researchers and writers that culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about "beliefs, norms and social practices" (Lustig & Koester, 2006, p. 142), of a "historically shared system of symbolic resources through which we make our world meaningful" (Hall, 1959, p. 4), a "collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede, 2011, p. 3) that distinguishes a group of people from other groups of people. Culture derives not from genes, but from the social environment. It is learned, not inherited (Spencer-Oatley, 2008). Hofstede states that although certain aspects of culture are physically visible,

their meaning is invisible. He contends that their cultural meaning "lies precisely and only in the way these practices are interpreted by the insiders" (1991, p. 8). Hofstede's model of the three levels of uniqueness in human mental programming – human nature, culture and personality (Hofstede, 1994, p. 6) – places human nature as common to all humans. It represents our ability to feel fear, anger, love, joy, sadness, the need to associate with others, to play and exercise, plus the ability to observe the environment and talk about it with others (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). How one expresses these feelings is modified by culture. Personality is individual. It represents a person's characteristics which are partly inherited and partly modified by culture. Culture can dictate that what is perfectly acceptable to one group of people, can be absolutely abhorrent to another. Spencer-Oatey (2008) contends that culture is as much an individual, psychological construct as it is a social construct. Social and cognitive processing may differ in individuals depending on their life experience, and forming conclusions about a culture based on stereotypes should be avoided. Lastly, culture has both universal (etic) and distinctive (emic) elements. An example of an etic element is that in all cultures people feel closer to their family and relatives and those they view as similar to themselves than to those they view as different. However, this may be adapted in different cultures to include wider or smaller groups, thus making it emic. It is the emic elements of a culture which are of greatest interest to researchers.

Avruch (2004, p. 20) states culture is "rooted deeply in on-going or past social practice and is to some extent situational, flexible and responsive to the exigencies of the worlds that individuals confront". This acknowledgment by Avruch is particularly relevant to the culture of TL, which has had many influencing factors with the scope to impact existing culture. Having an insight into the tumultuous history of invasions in TL can help to explain these influencing factors.

2.3   IDENTIFYING THE CULTURE OF TIMOR LESTE

It is important when discussing culture to acknowledge the ancient culture of TL from its prehistoric beginnings. The following is an extract from the website of freedom fighter and former Prime Minister of TL, Jose Ramos-Horta (2014):

> According to anthropologists, the first people to arrive in Timor, approximately 40,000 to 20,000 B.C., were of the Vedo-Australoide type, similar to the Vedas of Ceylon. A second wave, which arrived around 3000 B.C., consisted of Melanesians, similar to those living today in Papua New-Guinea and some Pacific Islands. Probably due to the mountainous nature of the country, these new arrivals did not mix with the former inhabitants, who withdrew to the interior mountainous regions. This may be one reason why Timor-Leste has so many different languages. A third wave of people, who arrived around 2500 B.C., consisted of 'Proto-Malays' – coming from South China and North Indochina. Even today, the Chinese in Timor-Leste, mainly Hakka, are one of the more important trading communities. There is documentation of sporadic trading between Timor and China as far back as the 7th century, including the slave trade and trade in beeswax and sandalwood, a rich wood used in the manufacturing of luxurious furniture and fragrances. By the 14th century, the inhabitants of Timor were paying taxes to the Java Kingdom. The name Timor comes from the name given to the island by the Malays — Timur means East. The Portuguese reached the coast of Timor around 1515.

> The Portuguese influence dominated for over 500 years during which time Portugal governed Timor-Leste with a combination of direct and indirect rule, managing the population as a whole through the traditional power structures rather than by using colonial civil servants. This model of governance left traditional Timorese society almost

untouched. 1974's coup in Portugal (the "Carnation Revolution") marked the beginning of decolonization for Portuguese Timor and other colonies; shortly afterward Timor's Portuguese Governor, Mário Lemos Pires, announced plans to grant the colony independence. Plans were drawn up to hold general elections with a view to independence in 1978. During most of 1975 a bitter internal struggle occurred between two rival factions in Portuguese Timor, FRETILIN (the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) and the rival faction, the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT). Taking advantage of the internal disorder, and with an eye to absorbing the colony, Indonesia immediately began a campaign of destabilization, and frequent raids into Portuguese Timor were staged from Indonesian West Timor. By late 1975 FRETILIN had gained control of Portuguese Timor. On 28 November 1975, Fretilin declared the independence of Portuguese Timor as "The Democratic Republic of East Timor", or "República Democrática de Timor-Leste" (RDTL).

Freedom was short lived. Nine days later, Indonesia invaded East Timor. Its warships landed at the capital of Dili and began rounding up and executing the leaders and members of the political parties, and their family members. In the early stages of the Indonesian occupation, more than 60,000 Timorese lost their lives, often under brutal conditions. Entire villages were exterminated. Torture centers were commonplace and political prisoners publicly executed en masse. Populations were forcibly displaced often resulting in large scale starvation. By the time the occupation ended, at least 200,000 Timorese — one third of their population — had perished.

In her report on the Timor Leste Governance Project directed by Steve Bracks, a former Premier of Victoria, Australia, Maureen Ryan (2014, p. 38) notes that "while the stories of invasion and war are prominent in the country's history, the cultural history, although shattered in part by these events, is sustained". Xanana Gusmao, Prime Minister of TL from 2007 to 2015, has been committed to preserving culture and heritage, and preserving the relationship between villagers and their sacred lands. He states "they (the villagers) will have the opportunity to go to their ancestors' lands ... not in an animist perception of life, but more like a ceremony, a ritual" (Gusmao as cited in Ryan, 2014, p. 38).

Mary MacKillop International is the international aid and development organisation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Australia. Their work in TL is extensive and their knowledge of the ancient culture of TL is well documented as their website states:

> In his address when he was sworn in as Prime Minister in July 2006, José Ramos-Horta stated: "Timorese people are deeply spiritual. Their lives are inspired and influenced by the spirits of the past and supernatural beliefs fused with Christian beliefs. We must not impose modern secularism or Europeanism to disturb the symbiotic relationship of Timorese animist and Christian beliefs." This symbiosis is shown in the traditional animist practices and beliefs which are still strong in Timor. Prominent among these is ancestor worship, devotion to the souls of the dead. Matebian, second highest peak in Timor, is the Mountain of the Souls of the Dead. Animistic beliefs in Timor include the concept of lulik, an all-pervading and powerful force, not easily classified by those outside the culture, and one which operates in the lives of many Timorese people even today. Any place, person or object with sacred qualities is called lulik. When something goes wrong in their lives, the people may go to these places to make an offering or to pray for forgiveness. Certain trees e.g. the banyan, would be considered lulik, as well as water, rivers, cascades, mountains and rocks where the souls of ancestors were believed to reside. Lulik can be a protector or a threat, to be both placated and sought after. Traditional customs called adat are the means by which proper recognition is given the lulik power, e.g. someone may intercede with the souls of the ancestors by visiting certain stones or trees, or performing actions or chants, or visiting anuma lulik, a sacred house. "Belief in sacred stones, sacred trees, sacred lakes or parts of the land runs deep in my memory … My image of God was a mixture of my animist beliefs from

my mum and grandmother, Buddhism traditions from my grandfather and Catholic customs from my father.". (Mary MacKillop International, n.d.)

Since independence in 2002, the Timorese have reclaimed their ancient Timorese heritage but perhaps there is no clear image of what Timorese culture is in its pure form. Competing discourses within TL related to understanding its own national identity in the contemporary world are influenced by the historical experience of two colonial powers – Portugal and Indonesia (Rawnsley, 2008).

The Portuguese landed missionaries in TL in the 1500s and their exploitation of the Timorese is well documented (Gunn, 1999; Rawnsley, 2008). The Portuguese influence for over 500 years and the introduction of Catholicism has impacted on spiritual beliefs. TL has historically practised a culture of animism and in stark contrast the Catholic Church believes humans are differentiated from animals and plants because only humans have a soul. Equally, the Indonesian occupation from 1975 until 1999, imposed the use of the Indonesian Bahasa language in schools for 25 years affecting the education of a vulnerable generation. After independence and during the reformation of TL as an independent nation, there was internal conflict mainly instigated by youth gangs. The decision of the new Government to make Portuguese the official language meant that youth who had been educated in Bahasa were prevented from taking part in the development of TL "as all official documents and interactions were written in Portuguese" (Wigglesworth, 2007, p. 62). The Indonesian legacy has left divisive effects in two ways, one causing an intergenerational gap with its youth and the second (the violence directed towards Timorese nationals by Indonesia) resulting in TL overemphasizing its European affinities, affording a sense of negativity towards the region in which it is situated, Southeast Asia (Rawnsley, 2008).

As TL grapples with these competing discourses when trying to understand its own national identity and define itself as a nation in the contemporary world, its self-understanding as a nation is influenced by the historical experience from the two colonial powers, Portugal and Indonesia. The extended relationship of Portugal to TL was characterised by exploitation over many centuries, culminating in abandonment in 1974 which left TL exposed to invasion by Indonesia. However, Rawnsley verifies that "in the new Constitution of TL 'Portugueseness' is a key defining pointer, firstly as an official language, secondly defining relationships with Lusophone countries, and thirdly officially recognizing the significance of the Catholic religion, the religion derived from their early colonizers. The structure of the East Timorese constitution is also largely shaped by the Portuguese Constitution" (Rawnsley, 2008, p. 4).

The culture of TL then is essentially a trichotomy. It consists of the ancient cultural heritage of animism, the 400 year influence of Portugal which imposed its Catholic religion resulting in 90% of the current population describing themselves as Catholic, and the neighbouring influence of Indonesia which imposed its language and culture on a vulnerable generation and a legacy of its brutality on a whole population. What can be said is that these modern influences are derived from two cultures (Portuguese and Indonesian) which are identified as high context cultures. In contrast, Australia, the country to which the twelve students from TL who are subjects of this

research came to undertake study, is identified as a low context culture (Hofstede, 2011). So the students from TL came from a high context culture and immersed themselves in a low context culture for a period of twelve weeks. Categorising cultures as high and low context has been the subject of extensive research as the following section will demonstrate.

2.3.1 High and Low Context Cultures

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1959) defines culture as the way people live their lives, the sum of their learned behaviour patterns and attitudes. Culture is subconscious, like an invisible control mechanism operating in our thoughts (Hall, 1983). Members of a society internalise the cultural components of that society and act within the limits of what is viewed as acceptable. Hall argues that we become conscious of our own culture through being exposed to a different culture. He divided cultures according to their styles of communicating into high context (much of the information is implicit), and low context (information is mostly explicit). According to Hall (1983), high context cultures are collectivist, preferring consensus to individual achievement. They rely on intuition and feelings, and communication relies heavily on context, such as facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures. These contextual elements help people to understand the rules and much is taken for granted within high context cultures. Low context cultures are individualistic and action orientated. Communication relies heavily on words, and decisions are more likely to be based on fact and reason rather than intuition. Very little is taken for granted and further explanation is often sought, meaning less chance of misunderstanding.

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall's theory of high context, low context cultures explains the powerful effect culture has on communication. Research has shown there are regular and systematic cultural differences in the way in which people send and receive information. People from low context cultures transmit information directly and rely heavily on verbal and written communication, whereas people from high context cultures employ coded messages to convey information and are more influenced by situational cues, such as facial expressions and context. There are also differences in self-disclosure and social penetration. The work of anthropologist Geert Hofstede in the 1970s defined differences in countries considered to be high context and low context cultures. His Hofstede model of six dimensions of national culture (Hofstede, 2011) captures the differences in national culture between high context and low context cultures. Hofstede's six dimensions of natural culture are Power Distance (power is distributed unequally), Uncertainty Avoidance (a society's tolerance for ambiguity), Individualism versus Collectivism (the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups), Masculinity versus Femininity (the distribution of values between the genders), Long Term versus Short Term Orientation (perseverance, thrift, and having a sense of shame versus respect for tradition, saving 'face' and personal steadiness and stability), Indulgence versus Restraint (gratification of basic and natural human desires versus regulation of gratification through strict social norms). Hofstede's model illuminates perceived differences in cultures and provides a method of organising data to highlight these differences. Hofstede's model offers a lens through which to analyse data gathered through the focus group and four case studies of the TL students. It is not used as a tool to define the culture of TL as high or low context but rather as a

means of organising the data to highlight the differences in culture between TL and Australia, and the intercultural adaptation which was required both by the students and the teacher to ensure the program's effectiveness.

2.3.2 Hofstede: Individualism versus collectivism and power distance

As explained in the previous section, Hofstede's (1980, 1991, 2011) theory aims to explain high context and low context cultural differences through certain dimensions, such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, long-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint. Of these, individualism versus collectivism and power distance could be observed in my interactions with the students in the classroom setting because of their particular relevance in the teaching and learning environment. The other dimensions can be more easily observed when studying the students within their own culture over a period of time, which is not part of this research. Individualism versus collectivism is defined by Hofstede (2008) as "the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side, we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose… On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families…". In individualist societies people will care for their family and close friends at the expense of the overall good. In collectivist societies the common goals, beliefs and values of the group are most important and the group wellbeing takes precedence over individual wellbeing. It was interesting to observe in some students the shift from spending their time caring and nurturing the group to branching out and experiencing the new culture in different ways. Equally interesting was understanding the deference of the group to me as the teacher and observing the growth in their confidence as they experienced being the vehicle of their own learning. Power distance is described by Hofstede as the extent to which a society accepts the inequality of power. Hofstede (2008) concedes that all societies are unequal but "some are more unequal than others".

2.4   CULTURESHOCK

Culture shock can occur when transitioning from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar environment, where established patterns of behaviour are ineffective. It is a mental state resulting from a powerful disruption of personal routines, ego and self-image. Troublesome social interactions can stem from an inaccurate exchange of information, such as messages reaching the receiver in garbled or distorted configurations. Oberg (1960, p.177) described the term culture shock as the "anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse".

Intercultural communication can be fraught with misunderstanding causing frustration and offence. Matsumoto, Leroux and Yoo (2005) identify uncertainty and ambiguity concerning the ground rules of intercultural communication as hindering the meaning of signals that may be given back and forth in an interaction between cultures. This can be especially difficult in communication between high and low context cultures, where expectations of behavioural

patterns can create absolute misunderstanding. Often, individuals from a different culture are not able to interpret responses from interaction partners and are unable to respond in an appropriate manner (Samochowiec & Florack, 2010). This also extends to interactions between people of a different culture and systems within a country they are visiting, such as a public transport system, communication systems, shopping, and unspoken social etiquette rules.

Anxiety in dealing with unknown cultures because of the inability to predict outcomes of intercultural communication, often results from a lack of understanding of the unspoken rules by which the interaction will occur (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). Gudykunst (2005) regards uncertainty in intercultural communication as a 'cognitive phenomenon', resulting from an inability to predict attitudes, feelings and behaviour outcomes from not being able to read both verbal and non-verbal cues. Matsumoto et al. (2005) assert self-concepts and individual values affect communication styles across cultures and that differences exist in the use of apologies, self-disclosure, compliments and interpersonal criticism. The pervasive influence of culture on all aspects of the communication process, underpins the difficulty people from different cultures will have in anticipating the meaning of verbal communication based on non-verbal cues. In explaining his theory of uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural communication, Gudykunst (1988) emphasises the necessity of recognising that at least one of the participants is a stranger. He argues that although the stranger is situated within the group at the time of the intercultural communication, he/she is outside the group in terms of cultural alignment. In my research of myself as a teacher of students from TL in Australia, it could be said that I was the stranger and they were the in-group (because there were twelve of them and one of me), however in the wider world outside the classroom they were displaced within the Australian culture. This meant that my position as the stranger within the classroom was juxtaposed with their positions as the stranger once we left the classroom and joined the cultural world that is Melbourne, Australia. In this situation, Gudykunst's theory assumes the strangers' initial experiences with a new in-group are experienced as a series of crises where the stranger is not cognitively sure how to behave. The stranger is basing their reactions to the group on known or previously experienced interactions within their own culture, often referred to as implicit theory or habitual reactions. This can be disorientating and disconcerting as the stranger realises the known ground rules or reactions of habit do not apply with those from another culture, creating heightened awareness of situation-behaviour sequences (Gudykunst, 2005).

As adults, these VET professionals, from a culture which employs a different (teacher centred) pedagogy within its education system, were placed in a learning environment where the onus for learning was openly placed on them as students. Some students experienced acute frustration, confusion and anxiety when they found themselves exposed to unfamiliar learning and teaching methods. They experienced learning cues as ambiguous, and often did not understand the expectations placed upon them. Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel (2004) define this as learning shock. They assert some learning can involve painful or distressing experiences, which can invoke feelings of failure and disappointment. In contrast, positive learning experiences can invoke a desire to discover, to explore, thus invoking exhilaration in the learning experience. They contend that positive emotions can enhance learning while

negative emotions can inhibit learning. Learning shock often assails adults returning to learning, and can be more acutely experienced when coupled with intercultural adaptation.

However, before investigating the dimensions of intercultural adaptation, it is important to understand the concept of students as sojourners in their pursuit of learning in a culture foreign to them, and in a language which they don't fully understand. Most of the TL students struggled with the English language and admitted that my Australian accent was very difficult to decipher. Their previous English language experience was with different accents such as Indonesians and Americans teaching English, and the students practising their English with volunteers from all over the world who travelled to TL with various not-for-profit organisations to assist in the rebuilding of TL. They had much to contend with in Australia, and speaking and comprehending English whilst trying to communicate with and please me, the teacher, was prominent in their focus group feedback.

2.5   THE STUDENTS AS SOJOURNERS IN CONTEXT

The students had minimal preparation for their sojourn in Australia, and on reflection, my preparation was ill-informed. I did not place enough emphasis in my preparation that as their teacher I might feel confronted by their experiences of invasion and violence and that the difference in my teaching style and way of behaving might be confrontational for them. Those students with prior experience in other cultures (Indonesia, Malaysia, Switzerland) had some advantage over those students who had not previously travelled outside TL, however the difficulty in communication they experienced because of their lack of English language skills, and the conflict they experienced in my teaching style (student centred), and their experience of teacher centred learning, was something neither they nor I had adequately prepared for. All twelve students expressed experiencing 'culture shock' (as reported in Chapter 6) to varying degrees and it is interesting to refer to recent research on international students to relate to others' experience of studying in a different culture.

The research studies on international students cited in this chapter involve research on students undertaking undergraduate degrees, therefore staying for periods much longer than twelve weeks, or expatriates working in foreign cultures, living mainly independently in separate accommodation, immersed in classes with local students and not receiving any stipend. In contrast the TL students travelled and arrived as a selected group for a period of twelve weeks fulltime study at the university. Their level of English was weak with only one student scoring the 5.5 IELTS points required for students studying at the university. They were accommodated in three apartments in the one complex within walking distance of the university. They had the support of one another for both communication and study. They were not isolated, nor were they particularly exposed to people outside their group, and they were supported by members of the wider university community who had a connection to TL. The students were each appointed a mentor but not all appointed mentors contributed to the same degree. The students from TL socialised with other students from TL within the university and were encouraged to socialise

with local students. They also were encouraged to socialise with the TL community in Melbourne, which was successful for some and not for others. They had one constant teacher who was responsible for their learning and their social and psychological wellbeing. They did not experience the isolation reported in some studies of international students on Australian campuses (Burns, 1991; Thomson, Rosenthal & Russell, 2006; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007). They were supported through English language tuition one day per week, which was delivered on a different university campus from their home campus. There were just twelve TL students within the classroom with an English speaking teacher. They were not sharing classroom time with local students, however guest presenters did instigate class discussion with the students and the students were expected to participate in English. They did not experience the financial anxiety of some sojourners (O'Reilly, Ryan, & Hickey, 2010) as their accommodation cost was paid for by the university, and they were supported financially through a weekly stipend paid into individual bank accounts to cover food, phone and transport costs. Financial difficulties experienced were around managing money rather than the provision of money. In alignment with a study undertaken by Brown (2008) in the United Kingdom, the source of most stress for these students was the demanding nature of a post-graduate qualification, requiring a high level of English language skills, and the dissonance between the academic culture in Australia and the teacher centred prior learning undertaken in TL and elsewhere. Significant difference in culture is found to be an important determinant of the student experience (Burns, 1991; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Thomson et al., 2006; Brown, 2008; Brisset, Safdar, Lewis, & Sabatier, 2010) as is confrontation with an alien academic culture. Thus it could be said the students experienced culture shock and learning shock. Prior travel experience, level of education, language proficiency (Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013), and personality factors have also been related to successful cross-cultural adjustment (Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004).

The TL students came to Australia for twelve weeks to study at the university. They were not migrants and nor were they tourists. They came for a specific length of time on study visas. Their visit could be viewed as a sojourn. According to Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) students as sojourners voluntarily go to another culture to study for a specified time and usually these sojourners originate from less developed countries than their host countries. Their commitment to an explicit goal of study means they are usually more committed than tourists but less involved than immigrants and resettled refugees. Returning to their country of origin is planned and anticipated, and they are likely to be highly motivated as the educational opportunity being offered to them is often seen as a privilege. The sudden loss of familiar verbal and non-verbal cues in communication, plus having to deal with unfamiliar systems of daily living, is likely to cause culture shock with subsequent psychological stress (Thomson, Rosenthal, & Russell, 2006). Adler (1975) takes a more positive approach describing the sojourn as more of a transitional process that creates higher self and cultural awareness. He describes culture shock as "an important aspect of cultural learning, self-development, and personal growth" (1975, p. 14). Adler claims that the disintegration of personal comfort and the creation of "new evolutionary dynamics" (Dabrowski as cited in Adler, 1975, p. 15) creates a

"reorientation of personality at higher levels of consciousness" (Adler, 1975, p. 15) as a result of the conflict and confusion inherent in the change experiences. Adler describes a shift from a state of low self and cultural awareness to a higher awareness of both aspects through a transitional experience. During initial contact with the new culture, sojourners are still integrated or positioned within their own culture, and they experience euphoria and excitement. As the euphoria subsides and the difficulty of dealing with a different set of behaviours, values and attitudes becomes a reality, tension and frustration increase and the sojourner experiences a growing sense of difference and isolation. Rejection of the new culture often follows as the sojourner becomes hostile to the differences perceived and increasingly not understood. The degree of hostility is dependent on the sojourner's previous experience with different cultures. The finishing stage of the transitional experience comes with the development of skills to deal with the differences in culture. Adler calls this 'autonomy', where the sojourner is comfortable with the status of both insider-outsider in two different cultures. This leads to Adler's final stage of independence, where the sojourner is able to embrace cultural differences and similarities, and use these to transition himself to a higher state of self-awareness. Although Adler's paper is dated and has been superseded by many studies on culture, I have used his paper as a resource for two reasons. Firstly, it has been cited by over 900 researchers making it a primary source in the field of cultural shock and secondly, the majority of researchers drawn upon for this study have cited Adler's seminal paper.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, the great German philosopher who wrote his PhD under the supervision of Heidegger, developed the philosophy of hermeneutics to include examining preconceptions which might hinder our understanding. He believed this examination of preconceptions will give us greater understanding of the meaning of language. Gadamer has a theory on the fusion of horizons which fits nicely with Adler's concept of embracing cultural differences and similarities to transition to a higher state of self-awareness and cultural awareness. Gadamer describes a fusion of horizons, reported by Vessey (2009, p. 540) thus:

> Horizons fuse when an individual realizes how the context of the subject matter can be weighted differently to lead to a different interpretation from the one initially arrived at. Either new information or a new sense of the relative significance of available information leads, at the very least, to an understanding of the contingency of the initial interpretation, quite possibly to a new understanding of the subject matter, and ideally to a new agreement between the two parties about the subject matter. In any case, the original understanding is surpassed and integrated into a broader, more informed understanding. Our horizons are broadened; we have a new perspective on our old views, and maybe new views as well. This is the meaning of 'the fusion of horizons'.

Clark (2008) contends Gadamer teaches that understanding happens when our present understanding or horizon is moved to a new understanding or horizon by an encounter. Thus the process of understanding is a 'fusion of horizons', with the old and the new horizon combining into something of living value. Gadamer explains we do not move into a new horizon, our horizon moves with us. Vessey (2009) claims Gadamer uses the term 'horizon' as meaning the conditions of understanding which direct us towards deeper or new understandings (p. 538). Vessey further explains that for Gadamer, the "horizon of a sentence presents the sentence as belonging to a linguistic, cultural, and historical world" (2009, p. 537) and that without a sense of

the historical or cultural context of that sentence, judging the relative significance of it would be impossible.

It is important to acknowledge that not every sojourner will experience to the same degree a fusion of horizons or greater self and cultural awareness. Factors such as personality (Ward, Leong & Low, 2004; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2013), prior learning experience (teacher centred learning), travel experience and language proficiency (Sawir, 2005) may contribute significantly to a sojourners' cultural adjustment (Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013).

2.6   THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY, PRIOR LEARNING EXPERIENCE, TRAVEL EXPERIENCE AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ON CULTURAL ADAPTATION

2.6.1 Personality

Ward and Chang (1997) suggest that rather than personality being the major influencing factor on cross-cultural adaptation, cultural adaptation is more influenced by the ability of the sojourner to conform and adapt to the core values and collective behaviours of the host culture. This was contradicted by a study undertaken in 2004 by Ward et al. who conducted research on a group of Singaporean students (sojourners) in Australia and a comparative group of Australian expatriates and Chinese Singaporeans working in Singapore. The research investigated "the cultural fit between the acculturating individual and host-culture norms" (p. 138) to emphasise the influence of the cultural context on psychological processes (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok as cited in Ward et al., 2004), questioning whether "the cultural fit proposition is viable in both individualist and collectivist cultures" (p. 138). Both psychological and sociocultural (social skills and cultural adaptation) skills were studied. According to Ward et al. (2004) communication theorists note the situational context varies in individualist and collectivist cultures from open and direct in individualist, to more reserved and ambiguous in collectivist. It was thought a cultural fit between host culture and sojourner was more likely to reduce uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural communications. However Ward et al.'s research revealed this is not the case. Their research confirmed the 'Big Five' (2004, p. 144) personality factors (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness) attributed to Costa and McCrae (1992) are bigger influencing factors on cultural adaptation. According to van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2013, p. 936) "an impressive number of studies have shown meaningful relationships between personality and intercultural adjustment outcomes". After undertaking an extensive literature review, they identified five personality traits that enhance cultural adaptation: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility. However in their study on personality and sojourner adjustment, Ward et al. (2004) posit that host culture values and behaviours (norms) may be "more relevant to the relationship between openness and extraversion and psychological adjustment" in interpersonal interactions.

2.6.2 Prior learning experience

Students with experience of a didactic, teacher centred approach to learning, as in most high context cultures with little emphasis on classroom conversation, experience difficulty in adjusting to our student centred pedagogy, where they are called upon to participate. Burns (1991, p. 74) states "in terms of study shock (sojourners) appear to face an intellectual revolution, where questions, argument, criticism and participation are required, where informal teachers raise questions and leave them unanswered expecting further reading to pursue the issue". Students with teacher centred learning experience rarely challenge the teacher, and critical thinking and independent study are an unknown. This is compounded when their host teachers, from developed, low context cultures, use a student centred pedagogy and often assume sojourners at graduate level will possess critical reading and analysis skills, problem solving, and internet research skills (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014).

2.6.3 Travel experience

If sojourners have not previously encountered different cultures through travel outside their own country, initial exposure to a very different culture can be confronting and destabilising. For students from a developing country, exposure to technology, public transport and commercialism can be overpowering. The greater the cultural difference separating the sojourner from the host culture, the more difficulty the sojourner will have in adapting (Bochner, 2003).

2.6.4 Language proficiency

With globalisation, there is increasing emphasis on spoken English as a means of communicating, particularly for sojourners. However traditional teaching of English as a Foreign Language takes a scholastic approach placing emphasis on grammar and written English (Sawir, 2005). Ren, Bryan, Min and Wei (2007) report students from China and Korea had little spoken English skills, stating their English teachers focused on vocabulary and grammar. Often sojourners arrive at their host culture feeling confident about their English language skills only to discover they have difficulty understanding the English accent of their teachers, and their verbal skills are inadequate for classroom discussion. They revert to speaking amongst themselves in their native language. Ren et al. (2007) warn teachers not to rely on English language scores to identify levels of English proficiency in sojourners.

2.7   THE TEACHER OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CONTEXT

Although I had been teaching at the university for 25 years, I had limited previous experience of teaching international students. My experience of the culture of TL was limited to one week spent in Dili with a university delegation who attended many diplomatic meetings, exposing me to the expertise of my colleagues in dealing with the TL culture. I gained firsthand experience of Timorese teaching environments through visiting educational facilities, both primary and tertiary. The disparity between the primary school and tertiary institute facilities was striking due to the Government of TL being intent on skilling its population to rebuild the infrastructure of TL. I witnessed the destruction which had taken place over the previous decades and there was

much rebuilding to undertake. I attended the Archives & Museum of East Timorese Resistance which detailed the trauma suffered by the people of TL. My preparation for encountering my students from TL was naive in retrospect. I read the history of TL and several research papers on teaching international students and internationalising the curriculum. I could not anticipate the culture shock I would experience as I had relied on the fact that I was teaching within my own culture. Most research on culture shock is in relation to students or teachers travelling to another culture to study or teach. I anticipated that my years of experience in teaching diverse groups of adult students would support me within the classroom. I had practised reflexivity in my teaching and had been teaching transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000) for many years. I approached my teaching of this group on the basis that I had learning outcomes to achieve at AQF Level 8 (as described in 1.4) and that there would be gaps in the students' prior learning. What I had not anticipated was their reliance on me. Most of the group did not know each other. Very few of them had grasped the interconnectedness of their TVET system and did not understand how they could use each other for knowledge and skill development. I spent the first two weeks coming to terms with what they did not know and making plans to fill the gaps. They also demonstrated a lack of academic critical thinking skills. Part of my culture shock stemmed from coming to terms with what I had to achieve in twelve short weeks with them. After the honeymoon period as described by Adler (1975), my experience of culture shock was dismay at what I had undertaken in agreeing to guide these students through an AQF Level 8 qualification with only twelve weeks of face to face teaching. My experience and how I coped with this task is discussed in Chapter 5 'The Teacher – Autoethnography'.

2.8   CONCLUSION

The concept of the TL students being from a high context culture is supported by the work of Edward T. Hall in identifying differences in behaviour between high context and low context cultures. The first relies heavily on coded messages, body language, facial expressions and situational cues. Low context cultures are more direct in their communication, which relies heavily on the written word. There are also differences in self-disclosure and social penetration. This is a crucial foundation for understanding the relationship building process between myself and the Timorese students. Equally crucial in our understanding is Hofstede's model of collectivism versus individualism, and power distance. The collectivist approach is underpinned by a society which believes in the good of the community being more paramount than the individual. Without understanding this underpinning conceptual framework, the reader may consider the references in the following chapters to the culture shock experienced by both the students and the teacher as over re-active.

The TL students who are the subject of this research are deemed to be sojourners as their stay is short, purposeful and their intention was not to remain in Australia. There is a dearth of research literature on students as sojourners, so I contend this research is timely in contributing to the literature. Both culture shock and learning shock involve intercultural anxiety, the first in confronting a culture different to one's own, and the second in being plunged into a pedagogy which has not been experienced previously or which has been forgotten. Gudykunst and

Hammer (1988) argue that it is possible to reduce intercultural anxiety through such things as knowledge of host culture, shared networks, intergroup attitudes and favourable contact, and that reducing these uncertainties will assist intercultural adaptation. Another factor they identify as assisting in intercultural adaptation is an increase in second language proficiency. Carroll (2002) has suggested strategies for teaching international students effectively. These include being explicit, safe practice and feedback, lightening the cognitive load by allowing silences and thinking time during class, giving due notice before asking students to present or speak in class, teaching students to paraphrase and express personal opinions, and teaching them how to structure an academic argument. These academic skills should not be taken for granted in international students even at post-graduate level. Studies have demonstrated that cultural differences in approaches to thinking and learning exist. Vyncke (2012, p. 13) states research demonstrates that "critical thinking is a prime distinguishing feature between Anglo-American academic models and 'non-mainstream', or Confucian–based learning systems". The culture of countries where critical thinking is not practised has largely been attributed to their educational systems based on teacher centred learning where students must defer to the knowledge of the teacher. In teacher centred educational systems, questioning can be construed as being impolite and disrespectful. The students in this study have experience in a teacher centred educational setting, and studying in Australia in a student centred educational setting provided them with a different experience which produced high anxiety, and learning shock. In retrospect, as their teacher, I did not prepare adequately for the difference I perceived when confronted with teaching the students in the classroom. Having provided some context on the subject of my research, in the following chapter I explain my methodology, research design and methods.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes my methodology. In seeking to explore the relationship between the teacher and the students, a phenomenological approach was an appropriate choice as it involves a study of the lived experience. However given my research seeks to explore the *development* of the teacher-student relationship, rather than seeking a purely descriptive interpretation of the experiences of both the teacher and the students, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed exploration of how the ongoing choices, especially of the teacher, influenced the development of the teacher-student relationship. In addition the subjective nature of qualitative research means that equally deserving of critical evaluation is the positioning of the researcher in relation to the data. This declaration by the researcher of 'who am I in relation to the data' has emerged as increasingly influential on the perceived trustworthiness of the representation of qualitative data. Positioning does not refer to a physical configuration of the body of work but rather to a configuration of the philosophical beliefs of the researcher. What we know (ontology) and how we know it (epistemology) is a result of our philosophical beliefs, not a precursor to them. In seeking to understand my philosophical positioning when researching my teaching of this group of TL professionals, I found it helpful to answer four questions. What do I believe underpins my knowledge of life? Where did I gain this belief? How does this belief influence the way I react to situations and people? And what assumptions have I accumulated from my life experiences which may affect my reflexivity to social interaction? In my section on positioning I have used these four questions as a basis for exploring my philosophical beliefs, but I do not specifically address these questions plainly. Rather I have kept them in mind as I make sense of who I am in relation to the data. Referring to the literature, I explain hermeneutic phenomenology, and expand on my research design by identifying autoethnography and case study as my methods. Research design is central to the processes and outcomes of any research as it identifies the type of evidence required to answer the research question.

3.2   POSITIONING

As a teacher I have learned to practise reflexivity continuously in my teaching practice. I constantly monitor how my own reactions affect my teaching and my relationship with my students. As a researcher I strive to reflect on how my actions, values and perceptions react on the research setting and research participants. Reflexivity refers to the circular relationship between cause and effect and asks the question 'how does what I say, do, and think influence the data?' My learning has led me to understand that every lived experience has an impact on us, and the way we interpret that experience will shape how we react to our lived experiences in the future. This is the circle of cause and effect. If we think about our experiences in purely an

intellectual way we miss the opportunity of awareness, of understanding at a deeper level how this experience has impacted our being. My understanding of intuition lies in awareness beyond thinking which allows us to come closer to the universal truth, the truth that lies beyond individual versions of the truth. My understanding of self has been enhanced through extended reading of philosophical and spiritual works by philosophers, psychotherapists and theologians who have the clarity of mind to present in words the nature of the world and what we can know about it (ontology). My extended reading enables me to articulate these understandings in the charts below.

3.2.1 The concept of reality

Table 1: The concept of reality		
Philosopher	**Reality**	**My interpretation**
Albert Einstein 1935	Reality is an illusion. Intuition is the only real valuable thing.	We must listen to and value our intuition.
Anthony de Mello 1990	Reality is constantly changing. Once a person develops a concept of reality (static) it is already being left behind by a new reality (constantly changing).	Having a concept of reality inhibits intuition.
Eckhart Tolle 2005	The thinking mind is a tiny aspect of our consciousness. If we allow the thinking mind to create our concept of reality it becomes an illusion as reality is constantly changing and we must open our awareness to that change.	If we cling to an illusion of reality it will influence (distort) our future development.

Albert Einstein (1935) said man experiences himself, his thoughts, his feelings as something separated from the rest of the universe. He posits that reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one, and that the only real valuable thing is intuition. A person starts to live when he can live outside himself, when he can understand that the way he sees the world is influenced by the way he thinks about the world. Anthony de Mello (1990), an Indian Jesuit priest and psychotherapist, spoke of a person's *concept* of a thing or an event as being static, whereas *reality* is constantly in flux and the moment we observe reality, it is already changing. The moment we put things into a *concept* they stop changing or flowing for us and become static. Having a concept of what we believe reality is inhibits the intuition of humans in continually observing and questioning the world around us and within us. This idea of having a concept of reality is identified with the thinking mind, the illusory self, the unconscious or unobserved self. Eckhart Tolle, a modern German/Canadian philosopher says thinking is only a tiny aspect of the consciousness that we are (2005). The thinking mind develops a concept of reality that is an illusion, as reality is constantly changing. That illusion of reality then becomes the basis for all

further interpretations, or rather misinterpretations of reality. In summary, Einstein, Mello and Tolle all believe that reality is an illusion created by the thinking self and unless we can learn to live outside the experience which creates our illusion of reality, we will always be trapped inside it, thereby inhibiting our intuition. I strive to open myself beyond concepts, beyond thinking, in the hope of experiencing the world from a depth of unconscious feeling with the ultimate purpose of perceiving not just my own but other people's interpretations of reality. I strive to adopt an intuitive approach to my life and to my teaching. This intuitive approach includes questioning my emotional responses to recognise what it is in my emotional response that is making me feel the way I do.

3.2.2 Ontology

Table 2: Ontology		
Ontology Researchers	**The nature of the world and what we can know about it**	**My positionality**
Higgs and Trede 2010	Reality is socially constructed. Asks researchers to use words to describe experiences and perceptions of a lived world.	I describe my experiences with my students. They describe their experiences with me. These experiences will be different.
Guba and Lincoln 1994	Multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based.	Multiple interpretations based on social experience.
Ritchie and Lewis 2003	Reality is only known through socially constructed meaning.	Our collective reality will be known through socially constructed meaning.

In my intuitive approach (awareness beyond thinking) I acknowledge that from where they are standing (their history, background, culture) other people (the other) see reality differently from how I see it. Therefore, if we experience a moment together, what we feel and think are relative to who we are, the circumstances of our lives, the tradition or culture which we have inherited and practice, and the history of our country of residence. This is particularly relevant if the modern history of a country has profoundly impacted and shaped other's responses. According to Higgs and Trede (2010), ontology (the nature of the world and what we can know about it) is "socially constructed, dialogued, experienced or perceived by people ... asks researchers to use words and image to describe and interpret experiences and perceptions of their lived worlds" (2010, p. 33). Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain constructivism's approach to ontology includes "multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based" (1994, p. 110). Reality is not independent of our beliefs and understanding, and reality is only knowable through the human mind and socially constructed meanings of dialogue and experiences (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). My ontological approach is intuitive as I acknowledge the mental

constructions of the truth within my internal dialogue. I believe truth is negotiated through dialogue, is socially constructed, and is perceived differently by all people.

3.2.3 Epistemology

Table 3: Epistemology		
Epistemology Researchers	**How we can know about reality**	**My positionality**
Higgs 2001	Reality is constructed intersubjectively through interpretivism.	Assume the researcher and the social world created through interacting with students would impact on, and influence, each other.
Ritchie and Lewis 2003	An interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm assumes the researcher and the social world impact on each other and findings are inevitably influenced by the researcher's perspective and values.	We cannot separate ourselves from what we know. My research will be influenced by what I know.
Russell and Kelly 2002	Acknowledge transient nature of reality while being mindful of the interpersonal relationships that ultimately shape and define our experience.	My values and perspectives will influence my relationships with my students and vice versa.
Cohen and Crabtree 2006	Researchers' values are intrinsic ... findings emerge through dialogue.	Truth is negotiated through dialogue.
Peng and Nisbett 1999	The dialectical process allows a community with different cultural backgrounds to come to an understanding of their social world.	Different cultural backgrounds can bring change to both parties in a dialogue depending on the interaction and the context.
Dervin 2003	Context is a process. Attention must be given to change over time, to emergent and fluid patterns	Turn the research lens back on myself to understand the process
Lincoln and Guba 1985	Impossible to separate cause from effect as all entities are in a state of simultaneous shaping.	The process will stimulate simultaneous shaping.
Pickard 2007	Interpretivism seeks to understand the entire context both micro and macro.	Seek meaning in the actions of individuals and the group.

Table 3: Epistemology		
Epistemology Researchers	**How we can know about reality**	**My positionality**
Berger 2015	Researchers need to carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs and experiences through practice of reflexivity.	Emphasis on reflexivity as a process rather than a single action.
Watt 2007	Use of reflexivity is deemed essential because the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection.	Autoethnography centres the researcher in the story so reflexivity is essential.
Russell and Kelly 2002	Reflexivity also allows researchers to become aware of what inhibits their seeing or knowing.	I must be aware of my assumptions to allow for deeper analysis to illuminate what is not being seen.

Reality as we know it is constructed intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially. This places me in the epistemological stance of interpretivism/constructivism with a central goal of seeking to interpret the social world of myself and my students (Higgs, 2001). The central tenet of epistemology focuses on how we can know about reality and what is the basis of our knowledge. An interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm assumes the researcher and the social world impact on each other and findings are inevitably influenced by the researcher's perspective and values (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Postmodern research paradigms acknowledge the transient and ephemeral nature of reality (Russell & Kelly, 2002) while promoting mindfulness of the interpersonal relationships that ultimately shape and define our experience.

My epistemological stance in this research assumes the researcher and the social world created through interacting with students would impact on, and influence, each other. We cannot separate ourselves from what we know. As the researcher, through interacting with my students, I was inevitably influenced by my perspective and values thus making it impossible for me to have conducted objective, value free research. The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm posits that researchers' values are intrinsic in all phases of the research process, and that the findings of the research emerge through the dialogue that takes place between the researcher and the researched (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Indeed, Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose that under an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, the researcher and the research participants are assumed to be interactively connected so that the data are literally shaped as the research proceeds. When an action is completed and the researcher lens is turned back on it as part of the reflexive process, its meaning will be modified. It is impossible to separate cause from effect, as all entities are in a state of simultaneous shaping (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this way the conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology all but disappears.

Individual versions of the truth are negotiated through dialogue and the context of that dialogue is vital to the shaping of the data. It is through the dialectical process (the tolerance for holding apparently contradictory beliefs (Peng & Nisbett, 1999)) that members of a community with different cultural backgrounds come to an understanding of their social world. The researcher and the participants are both 'changed' by the experience and the new knowledge is a result of this interaction, bound by both the timing of the interaction and the context in which the interaction took place. "Context is something you swim in like a fish. You are in it. It is you" (Dervin, 2003, p. 130). Dervin proposes that most writers about context postulate its meaning as a focus on process. She states it is "attention to process, to change over time, to emergent and fluid patterns" (Dervin, 2003, p. 116). Context becomes known when the researcher turns the research lens back on the researcher. Interpretivism/constructivism manifests understanding of the meanings behind the actions of individuals and therefore seeks to understand "the entire context, at both the macro and micro environmental level" (Pickard, 2007, p. 13).

3.2.4 Reflexivity

As a participant researcher, it was my responsibility to be mindful of the context at all times and my place within that context. I sought to achieve this by adopting reflexivity, a practice I was familiar with. Berger's (2013) definition of reflexivity takes into account the positionality of the researcher.

> "Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of a researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (BERGER, 2013 p. 2).

Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality, as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome (Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003; Stronach, Garrett, Pearce, & Piper, 2007).

The emphasis on reflexivity as a process rather than an attitude or a single action aligns with my philosophy that reality is constantly in flux and the moment we observe reality, it is already changing. The automatic internal dialogue commences as soon as we experience something, and being aware of that internal dialogue and taking control of it is the essence of reflexivity. In order to take control of this internal dialogue, Berger (2013) argues that researchers need to "increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal" (p. 220).

Countertransference is a term used in psychodynamic language (Berger, 2013) to explain the impact of clinical practitioners' own history and issues on their understanding of and reactions to the client. Reflexivity in research is the researchers' acknowledgement of and response to the impact of their own history and life issues on their interactions with their research participants. As a white Australian female, 63 years of age, married with three children, English speaking

with knowledge of French, with 25 years of teaching experience at the university but no previous experience teaching students from a least developed country, I was forced to acknowledge my own inadequacies in 'teaching' students whose life experience was in many ways much more profound than mine. This was juxtaposed with my level of education and sophistication of travel and lifestyle, which placed me in a position of seeming to have skills to cope with the situation. I was a 'babe in the woods' unaware of the impact my students would have on me.

The practice of reflexivity in my interactions with my students allowed me to examine my own contribution to the way our relationships developed. Reflexivity has been increasingly recognised as an essential strategy in the process of producing knowledge through qualitative research. "Since the researcher is the primary 'instrument' of data collection and analysis, reflexivity is deemed essential" (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Russell & Kelly, 2002; Stake as cited in Watt 2007, p. 82). It was essential for me to use my reflexivity as a means to achieve an expansion of my understanding of myself and my students in our interactions. According to Russell and Kelly (2002) reflection allows researchers to become aware of not only what enhances their ability to see, but also what may inhibit their seeing.

3.2.5 Theories of adult learning influencing my methodology

Table 4: Theorists who underpin my methodology		
Denzin 2009	Interpretive perspective is based on an espoused theory.	What stance am I as the researcher taking.
Argyris and Schon 1974	Double loop learning requires recognising the researcher's espoused theory to contrast with the theory in action (the theory actually used).	How did I intend to react versus how I actually reacted.
Mezirow 1990	Transformative learning requires a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built, and our habits in making meaning. He differentiates between meaning schemes (habitual) and meaning perspectives (higher order developed through experience). Meaning perspectives are most often acquired through cultural adaption.	What suppositions do I make concerning my relationships with my students.

Denzin (2009) states "the storytelling self that is presented is always one attached to an interpretive perspective", an "espoused theory" (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. viii) that gives the writer a "public persona" (p. 89). In practicing reflexivity, the term "espoused theory" from the work of Argyris and Schon (1974) is one I have consistently included in my teaching and

researcher practice. In other words, I both teach the theory of practice according to Argyris and Schon and I strive to practice the theory through double loop learning. Argyris and Schon (1974) developed a framework that explained the cognitive structure and processes of problem solving that people engage in, based on their world view and assumptions. They assert that people develop maps in their heads about how to plan, implement and review their actions. They further assert that most people are unaware that these maps they develop for taking action are not consistent with the actual theories they explicitly espouse (the way they would like to act) and that most people are unaware of the inconsistency of the theories they actually do use (Argyris, 1980).

Argyris and Schon propose that most people undertake single loop learning when they reflect on their actions without examining what assumptions their actions are based on. If an individual faces a particular situation that has been experienced previously, then based on the individual's core assumptions about this situation, the individual will take a particular action to either explain, predict or control the situation or outcome (Argyris & Schon, 1974). It is in the examination of the underlying or unconscious assumptions which predict the action taken that double loop learning occurs. Argyris developed the Ladder of Inference (Fig. 1) in 1990 as a tool to understanding the thinking process humans undertake when faced with a situation and why they think as they do about an issue. The Ladder of Inference is a tool used to help people recognise their tendency to make claims about the world that they assume to be true, and, therefore, expect others to accept without question.
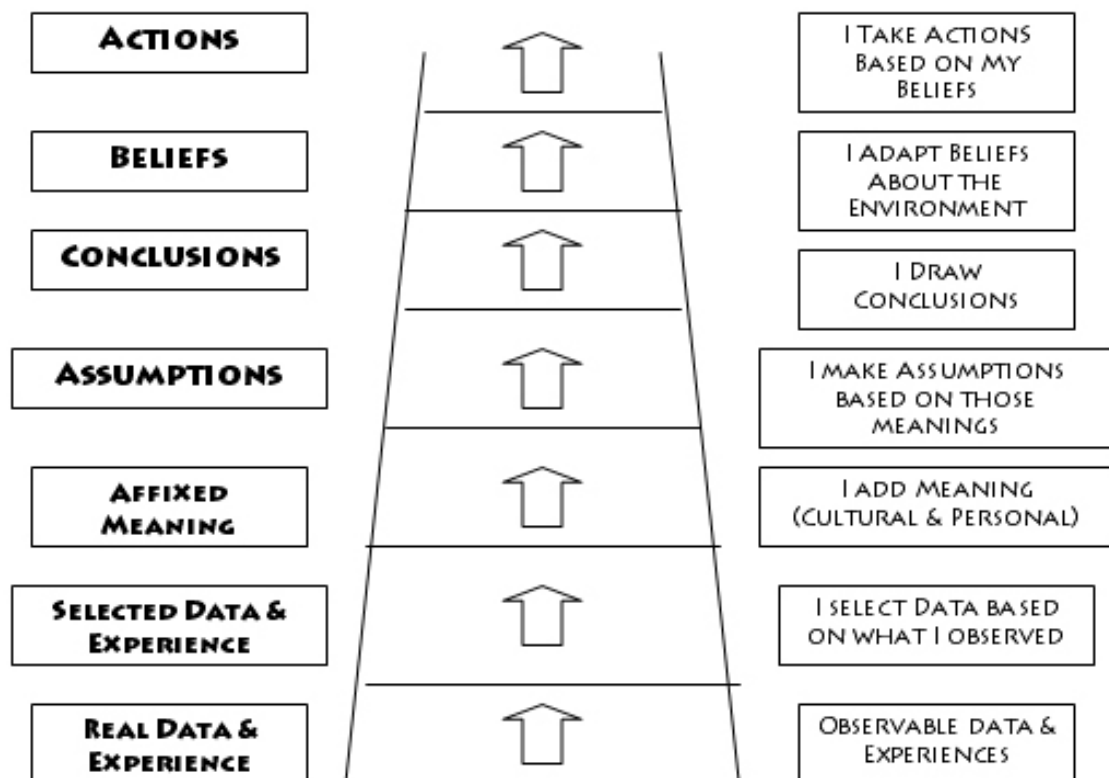
Figure 1: Argyris and Schon: Ladder of Inference (Google, 2015)

The observable data is shared data – what is seen and experienced by everyone involved in the experience. At the second rung, people select which data they will carry forward to the next level of adding meaning to the experience. As an example, if two people are attending the same work meeting at which a manager indulges in an angry outburst, one person might recall a part of the outburst which relates to something (s)he is particularly sensitive to, while the other might recall the physical expressions of anger. The first person's sensitivity might relate to a particular previous experience of anger with the manager over a work issue while the second person's concentration on the physical expression of the anger might relate to previous childhood experiences of an abusive parent. Both people carry their selected data forward to add meaning to the experience and develop assumptions based on that meaning. The first person's assumptions might reinforce beliefs that the manager does not like a particular aspect of his/her work, while the second person might reinforce beliefs that (s)he and colleagues are 'victims' of an angry manager. Both people will take action according to the beliefs they have developed based on their assumptions. Double loop learning implies that unless these two people can reflect on the assumptions they have drawn from the observable data, their future interactions with this manager will be influenced by the beliefs they carry with them. The further up the ladder they go, the further apart their interpretation of the experience becomes until they finally reach the rung of action. Double loop learning involves returning to the observable data of our experience to distinguish what data we have selected to take forward and what it is in our personal and cultural life experiences which affect how we add meaning to that data. This depth of analysis is required to understand our theory in use (how we *actually* responded) and compare it to our espoused theory (how we would like to have responded or how we *believe* we responded).

Mezirow's Transformation as Critical Reflection Theory also guided my exploration of how my perspective and values were exposed, explored and transformed during my teaching of the Timorese students. According to Mezirow (1990, p. 1) reflection enables us to detect and correct exaggerations in our beliefs and misrepresentations in our problem solving, and critical reflection involves a "critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built". Through critical reflection we undertake a process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience which underpins further interpretation in future experiences. This process promotes the development of expectations that "constitute our frame of reference" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1) similar to the assumptions described by Argyris, or "habits in making meaning" as described by Mezirow (1990, p. 1). Mezirow breaks down the habits in making meaning into two dimensions – meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Meaning schemes are rules for interpreting which are implicit and habitual and which apply to repetitive daily activities, such as expecting food to satisfy our hunger. Meaning perspectives are higher order theories and beliefs developed through experience which guide our process of interpretation of the lived experience. These meaning perspectives are most often acquired through cultural adaption but can also be purposively learned, such as religion. They can also develop through stereotypes, such as what it means to be a woman. They refer to the structure of assumptions which underpin the way new experience is assimilated and transformed.

Personal constructs of past experience determine the way we interpret lived experience which in turn will reinforce our assumptions. Mezirow differentiates between active interpretation and reflective interpretation by emphasising the examination of the underlying assumptions or meaning perspectives in the reflective interpretation of the lived experience. He states that "reflection on presuppositions is what we mean by critical reflection" (1990, p. 6).

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1990, 2000) has underpinned the way I teach my adult students. Mezirow (1990) described psychological distortions experienced by adults based on presuppositions (assumptions) which generate unwarranted anxiety, thereby impeding both thoughtful action and critical reflection. These can stem from traumatic events experienced in childhood or even adulthood. He states:

> The psycho-educational process of helping adults learn to overcome such ordinary existential psychological distortions can be facilitated by skilled adult counsellors and educators as well as by therapists.... Educators .... can provide skilful emotional support and collaborate as co-learners in an educational context (1990, p. 17).

Creating the existential moment to enable transformative learning for my students has become a challenge for me with each particular group of students, particularly with my Career Change students whose training included learning to support youth at risk of dropping out of the school system. As part of the GCVET, these students were required to understand and experience transformational learning. To facilitate transformational learning I have asked past students to draw their own school experience. One student drew a dark sky, a church spire and a priest taking a young boy by the hand and walking him away from other boys playing. Another in the same group drew a rainbow, a schoolhouse, flowers and two girls skipping with a rope. In handling the disparity in these revelations I asked students to privately reflect on what their school experience meant for them. I felt I could not take the depicted expressions to a further analysis because it may have been a breach of my role as educator. I made the assumption the first student may have been sexually abused and I chose not to explore this any further. In this event, I sought to create the opportunity for transformative learning but left it to students to interpret their own reflection on their schooling.

To facilitate transformational learning with past groups of students I have also used a creative visualisation guided meditation, where I asked students to close their eyes and spend ten minutes visualising their life in ten years' time – they were asked to 'see' what they looked like, what they were wearing, where they lived, their home, the people they lived with, what type of work they were doing, who they worked with. They then wrote down what they visualised and were asked to make a judgement on whether they liked what they saw. The critical element to this exercise is that if there is anything in their vision they were not happy with or did not like, then they must make changes to the way they think now, because if they continue thinking the way they now think, then what they saw is what they will create. This exercise is coupled with tuition on Argyris' Ladder of Inference (1990) and Mezirow's Transformative Critical Reflection Theory (1990). One student in his early forties came to me privately after this exercise to reveal his vision had shown him he would live with his wife's best friend in the years to come. His wife had died only three months earlier and he was somewhat distressed about this revealed

aspiration in himself. I felt it was important to assist him to understand that his wife might have wished this for him and might even have inferred this unconsciously before she died, giving him permission to live his life without her as he wished. This may have been a profound existential moment for this student.

These tools of my teaching practice have been firmly based in my study of the roles of the unconscious, and the underlying assumptions which determine our actions and reactions, and our consequent ability to critically reflect on these assumptions. This self-acknowledgement deeply influenced my preparatory thinking about my research as I deemed it important to acknowledge this aspect of my teaching philosophy. My teaching is not underpinned by what I know, but rather who I am and what I believe. According to Laverty (2003) this aligns with Heidegger's view that 'consciousness is a formation of historically lived experience' and cannot be viewed as separate from the world (p. 24). Hermeneutic phenomenology, according to Heidegger (1962), is interpretivist. It is a study of how we interpret our world influenced by our historically lived experience. I explore this further in the next section, and then explain how this theoretical construct influenced my choice of methods.

3.3   HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is a source for questioning the meaning of our lives. It is the study of lived experience to determine how our lives and our understanding of our lives are shaped. Husserl (1970) is often credited with developing the concept of phenomenology (Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi, 2012; Laverty, 2003, Scruton, 1995 Van Manen, 2014,). He contended the 'life world' is understood as what we experience pre-reflectively, without the benefit of categorization or conceptualizations, and often includes what is taken for granted or considered as common sense. Returning to re-examine these taken for granted experiences underpins phenomenology with the intention of discovering new meaning (Husserl, 1970). Enlarging on this theory, hermeneutic phenomenology fostered by Heidegger (1962) claims that to be human is to interpret. Therefore meaning is not something that is final and stable, but is continually open to new insight through revision and reinterpretation, through coupling the study of the experience with its meanings. Heidegger claimed an investigation of consciousness is necessarily influenced by the historicality of background of both the researcher and the participants, as pre-understanding is not something a person can step outside of or put aside. In fact, the assumptions and expert knowledge of a researcher can be valuable guides to hermeneutic research and can make the research a meaningful activity (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger asserts there is co-constitutionality in hermeneutic phenomenology, where the meanings arrived at by the researcher are a merging of the meanings articulated by both participant and researcher within the focus of the inquiry (Koch, 1995). Lopez and Willis (2004) assert that rather than seeking purely descriptive interpretations of the real, perceived world in the narratives of the participants, a hermeneutic phenomenologist will focus on seeking out the meanings of the individuals' experiences and how these meanings influence the choices they make (Smith as cited in Lopez & Willis, 2004). "This might involve an analysis of the historical, social, and political forces that shape and organize experiences" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729).

Dervin's (2003) emphasis on context in the pursuit of understanding the lived experience is re-enforced here. Aligned with my interpretivist/constructivist approach I came to understand that I practice hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy as my way of being and my way of navigating my world. It was plausible then that I would use hermeneutic phenomenology to explore the lived experience of my Timorese students studying in Melbourne and myself as the teacher in this project.

Probing the essence of phenomenology

Phenomenology is essentially the study of lived experience or the life world (van Manen,1997). It considers the world as lived by a person and not as an experience that is separate from a person (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Phenomenology is a methodology that helps us understand the nature and meaning of everyday experience. It investigates the meaning of participants' experiences of a phenomenon in which the researcher is either an observer or a participant (van Manen, 1997). In essence, "phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 4). Husserl (1970) asserts that all knowledge begins with experience, but not every experience produces knowledge. It is how we interpret the lived experience which determines whether developed knowledge will result from the experience. Generally we can see the experience as something that happens to us (beyond our control), and which we react to in the moment, and then we can also see the experience as something we become conscious of and begin to interpret. The pre-reflective stage is when the experience happens to us, before we consciously start thinking about it. We suspend our judgement, and set aside our assumptions, to instead analyse the phenomenon itself, in its purity. Husserl (1970, p. 58) describes it as "an epoche – we call it the 'transcendental reduction' ... an accomplishment of a reduction of 'the' world to the transcendental phenomenon 'world,'". Husserl's method is referred to variously in the literature as the epoche, phenomenological reduction, or bracketing (Husserl, 1970; Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi, 2012; Laverty, 2003; Van Manen, 2014). According to Husserl (1970) the epoche dictates that any phenomenological description must be written in the first person to ensure it is described as it is experienced.

My reading on phenomenology has prompted me to be aware, differently, of existential moments arising from experiences as they happen. Prompted by an experience such as an image in a movie or an interaction with another person, I often 'see' a whole general concept of human behaviour before I reach the stage of reflecting on that concept in the particular circumstances of my experience. The mental vision (what I see) looks like an instantaneous mind map with connections feeding into thought resulting in an understanding of the human experience. The vision is fleeting but the memory explodes in my mind for recall in times of reflection. An example of such an existential moment occurred whilst I was viewing the film *Mandela*. Mandela had been imprisoned for 15 years and a scene in the movie showed him cleaning his shoes in a sparse but orderly cell. An explosion of understanding washed over me, that a human can survive torment in life if s/he can bring some routine and order to that torment, thereby establishing some minor control over their life. Establishing a sense of control in the minute detail of one's life has a philosophical meaning. Not an earth shattering insight and one

which felt familiar, however my *understanding* of this insight as a phenomenon compelled me to question how and why this is so and as a result I now construct order in the minute detail of my own existence when life feels out of control for me. It is capturing this moment of pre-reflective experience and its interpretation which I now understand is at the core of hermeneutic phenomenology.

In his book *Phenomenology of Practice* (2014) Van Manen further explores the concept of phenomenology as the study of pre-reflective experience:

> Phenomenology constantly questions the assumptions and presuppositions that prevent us from adequately understanding and expressing in words the living moments of immediate experience – no matter how analytically insightful, descriptively rich, or poetically evocative our words may be. (Van Manen, 2014, p. 59)

The work of Husserl (1970) and his student Heidegger (1962) have been instrumental in the development of identifying the assumptions and presuppositions of both the researcher and participants in the context of the research. Interestingly, this philosophical approach to questioning the assumptions and presuppositions that influence our understanding of an experience aligns with the ladder of inference developed by Argyris and Mezirow, discussed in the previous chapter as a theory which I use in my teaching.

Pre-reflective experience is the ordinary experience of our everyday life, our experience of daily habit. Our reflection on our habitual experiences is not always phenomenological. What makes our reflection phenomenological is the authenticity of our reflection. Van Manen (2014, p. 29) posits that phenomenology is a philosophic method for questioning which enlightens us to insights "producing cognitive and noncognitive or pathic perceptions of existentialities, giving us glances of the meaning of phenomena and events in their singularity". "Wonder is a disposition that has a dis-positional effect: it dislocates and displaces us" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 37). Our phenomenological enquiry into our experience of wonder questions the "nature, meaning, significance, uniqueness, or singularity" of the experience (Van Manen, 2014, p. 39).

3.4   RESEARCHER LENSES – AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND CASE STUDY

The use of philosophic questioning is what sets phenomenology apart from other qualitative methods, as it is a meaning-giving method of inquiry. Meaning-giving features of the hermeneutic/phenomenological method include the image, the anecdote, the example, and the pathic. Van Manen distinguishes phenomenology from other qualitative methods by asserting it does not have applied rules or an interpretive schema. It is instead a "method for questioning, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 29). Choosing methods then for my research was guided by my understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology. It was important for me to acknowledge who I am as a teacher in exploring how I developed my relationship with my culturally different students. I sought a method for Part 1 of my research which would allow me freedom of expression to explore my interpretation of my interactions with my students, understand the influence of my background, my historicality, on my interpretation, and which would promote understanding through

disclosure. Autoethnography provided me with the freedom of expression to seek understanding through disclosure . Equally, for Part 2 of my research which sought to investigate the perspective of the students, I chose case study as a method to allow freedom of expression for the students, supported through my interpretation of their experience based on my observation and the artefacts developed during their learning.

At its core, my research is animated by an interest in understanding how I responded to the cultural challenges of working with a group of students from a least developed country, and how these students responded to learning in another culture. My only experience of least developed cultures was as a tourist but none so devastated as TL and I had little experience of forming ongoing relationships with people from least developed countries. Equally, many of the students had no experience of living outside TL. This coming together of innocence had much to reveal and it was imperative the selection of methods to explore the cultural and social interaction between the students and myself supported this revelation.

3.4.1 Part 1 – Autoethnography – the teacher

In my role as teacher and project manager for the students from TL, I was initially their main source of learning about VET, life in a university and life in Melbourne, Australia. As such I was in a privileged position to observe both myself and my students as we came to terms with how we constructed ourselves socially as a group, how we adapted to our cultural differences and what outcomes we each achieved through this process of adaptation. I was not a disinterested observer. I was an active participant in the orientation of us towards each other, our cultures clashing and complimenting each other, and our life experiences opening chasms which invited us to take leaps of faith in understanding each other. Writing about my experiences was my catharsis, bringing to the surface repressed emotions and feelings in an effort to identify and relieve them, to make sense of them. It followed then that this process of analysing, through reflective writing, the progression of cultural adaptation experienced by me would also benefit my students through reflection on what transpired in our interactions. In addition, understanding our collective and individual experience from a cultural perspective would illuminate my own wisdom gained from my interpretation of the events that transpired throughout our time together.

According to Chang (2007) autoethnography is an ethnographic inquiry where the source of primary data is the autobiographic materials of the researcher. However Chang warns against self-indulgent introspection which alienates the reader from the cultural interaction which takes place. He argues that "autoethnography should be ethnographical in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (p. 207). Autoethnography should emphasise "cultural analysis and interpretations of the researcher's behaviours, thoughts and experiences in relation to others in society" (Chang, 2007, p. 207). My use of autoethnography as a method was aimed at enhancing an understanding of how the cultural difference impacted on me, my teaching and my relationship with my students. It was also intended to draw the reader into the inner workings of the social context studied, thereby enhancing the reader's own understanding and knowledge of the

culture studied. This could be explained as a collaborative journey between the author and the reader.

Chang (2007) emphasises the cultural (ethnographic) nature of autoethnography stating this characteristic distinguishes it from other forms of narrative writing by connecting the personal to the cultural, the self to the social (Reed-Danahay as cited in Chang, 2007). In autoethnography, the self refers to the ethnographer self (Chang, 2007). Alexander (2005) states autoethnography engages ethnographic analysis of personally lived experience. The development of this genre of research has been driven by a desire to produce significant, accessible and evocative accounts of personal experience in order to intensify our ability to empathize with people who are different from us (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography permits us a wider research lens with which to study our lived experience as it allows the researcher's influence to be acknowledged as it accommodates and even embraces subjectivity.

The process of authoethnography involves writing about and analysing selected epiphanies that stem from interactions involving being part of a culture (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Ellis et al. propose that it is a duty of autoethnographers in analysing their personal experience to consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies. They further contend that it is in the analysing of personal experience in such epiphanies that the characteristics of a culture become familiar to those both inside and outside the culture. In the autobiographical style of writing used in autoethnography, it is important to show through personal descriptive writing how the epiphany was invoked through thoughts, emotions and actions. Emphasising ethnographic performance, Alexander (2005), states showing is "less about reflecting on the self ... as an act of critically reflecting culture, an act of *seeing the self see the self through and as the other*" (p. 423). This showing can make writing emotionally rich but in order to enable the reader to consider the events in a more abstract way, it needs to be balanced with some telling. Telling is a style used by an author to state what happened from a less emotional, involved standpoint (Ellis et al., 2011). I searched for analytical and representational strategies that would enable me to increase self-reflexivity and honour my commitment to the actual, whilst providing the reader with an opportunity to think about the events in a more abstract way. In order to conform to this version of autoethnography, I used vignettes to describe (show) moments of cultural existential crises, and then explored my experiences by reflecting on the reactions I had, and the actions I subsequently took, in dealing with these crises (telling). Adopting this method of self-conscious reflexivity (Ellis & Bochner, 1996) has specified my exact relation to self and my culturally different students (Alexander, 2005). I strived for this process of showing and telling through the use of narrative vignettes based on memory recall and notes recorded as the event happened, followed by an analysis of my reflexivity to these crises. I have endeavoured to shun self-indulgent introspection by emphasising the cultural impact in my analyses of my narrative vignettes. They are not a story of my life. They are a story of my interaction with another culture (the other).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a vignette as a brief, evocative description, account or episode. In narrative vignettes or anecdotes, the pre-reflective impact is recalled to return the researcher to the conditions before reflection or the written word impacts on the recall, to restore contact with the lived experience (Van Mannen 2014). Van Mannen (2014, p. 252) has prescribed 'a certain succinctness' in the style of the anecdote. He suggests a set of guidelines for gathering powerful narrative material:

1.   An anecdote is a very short and simple story.
2.   An anecdote usually describes a single incident.
3.   An anecdote begins close to the central moment of the experience.
4.   An anecdote includes important concrete details.
5.   An anecdote often contains several quotes (what was said, done and so on).
6.   An anecdote closes quickly after the climax or when the incident has passed.
7.   An anecdote often has an effective or 'punchy' last line: it creates punctum.

Van Manen describes the use of the anecdote in autoethnographic writing to give voice to the unconscious, deep and pathic sensations experienced in the reduction moment. He contends that phenomenological writing should try to find "expressive means to penetrate and stir up the pre-reflective substrates of experience as we live them ... to discover what lies at the ontological core of our being" (2014, p. 240). We should use the expression of our anecdotes, the words we use to express our pre-reflective experience, to stir up memories of the event that remained previously unknown to us (in the unconscious). In this regard I allowed myself the liberty of writing freely whilst expressing my lived experience within vignettes, and only allowed myself reflection and editing when writing my analyses of the moments described in my vignettes. This almost hypnotic, trance-like state of expressing the existential moments captured in my vignettes allowed my unconscious to divulge the depth of my experience.

Humphreys (2005) used embedded autoethnographic vignettes to create stories to "elicit emotional identification and understanding" (Denzin as cited in Humphreys, 2005, p. 124). He connects with his innermost feelings during periods of career stress and describes experiences that his audience can connect with also. The reader is transported to the moment of truth for Humphreys. In another method of connecting with innermost feelings Saldana (2003) describes the use of ethnodrama in performance vignettes as "the reduction of field notes, interview transcripts, journal entries and so forth to salient foreground issues ... the 'juicy stuff' for 'dramatic impact' (Saldana, 1998, pp.184-185). The results are a participant's and/or researcher's combination of "meaningful life events" (Saldana, 2003, p. 221).

In order to make sense of the cultural impact of outstanding (impactful, transformational) interactions with my Timorese students, I have mentally transported myself to the pre-reflective moment using my journal entries as prompts to write my autoethonographic vignettes. Whilst I acknowledge the retelling of these stories has already altered the pre-reflective experience simply through putting the experience into words (Van Manen, 2014), the performance vignettes are the closest I could transport myself to the pre-reflective moment of happening. These

vignettes present a record of how I made sense as a practitioner of what happened. I have used a wide-angle lens with a focus on the social and cultural aspects of the personal, revealing multiple layers of consciousness, to understand the experience as lived. In so doing I have exposed the "vulnerable self that is moved, refracted and resisted" during the process of showing but I have attempted to focus on the social and cultural in my analysis, the telling (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008 p. 24).

Structured Vignette Analysis

The questions I had to ask myself in designing my autoethnography were how do I share what I have learnt from teaching my Timorese students and with what effect? (Holman Jones, 2005). Chang (2008) proposes that autoethnography allows researchers to become aware of their own behaviour by connecting with others through cultural windows. My students were under my tutelage for twelve months. In line with Chang's (2008) idea of cultural windows giving insight into adaptive behaviour, I have identified several existential crises which in my judgement caused a noticeable shift in my relationship with the group and with individuals within the group. I have also included some vignettes which explore my cultural adaptation whilst visiting TL. These cultural windows are chosen for their impact on both my teaching and my self-knowledge. Some of these vignettes were particularly difficult for me to experience and some fed my soul. They are chosen for their impact on me rather than through any desire to give a balance of positive and negative. If they come out in favour of one or the other it is by happenstance rather than by design.

I wanted to create a discourse that would capture the distress of my blunders and the delight of our group achievements within the context of our relationship. The challenge was to record these experiences in a method that both relayed the circumstances of the experiences (the context) and gave a layered account (Ronai, 1995) of the effect it had on me as their teacher. According to Ellis et al. (2011) layered accounts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection (Ellis, 1991) to 'invoke' readers to enter into the 'emergent experience' of doing and writing research (Ronai, 1992, p. 123), conceive of identity as an 'emergent process (Rambo, 2005, p. 583), and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analyses (Ronai, 1995, 1996).

To achieve these layered accounts I used a personal narrative discourse to create the context. To record as closely as possible the critical enquiry of the pre-reflective moment I used anecdotes to capture the phenomena of emotions and sensations experienced as my own life experience, and unconscious assumptions, collided with a moment of cultural confrontation. I followed each of these anecdotes with an analytical exploration of my reflexivity and how it progressed my relationship with my students (Fig. 2 below). As a result of my reflexivity, the strategies developed guided our group learning, and my concluding comments for each vignette highlight our group progression through the layers recounted. Holman Jones (2005, p. 766) suggests we look to the "personal, concrete, and mundane details of experience as a window to understanding the relationships between self and other or between individual and community". My vignettes aspire to purposeful and tension-filled self-investigation, to seeing my own part in

the relational situation, particularly my own "frightened or cowardly or self-deceived part" (Gornick, as cited in Holman Jones, 2005, p. 35).
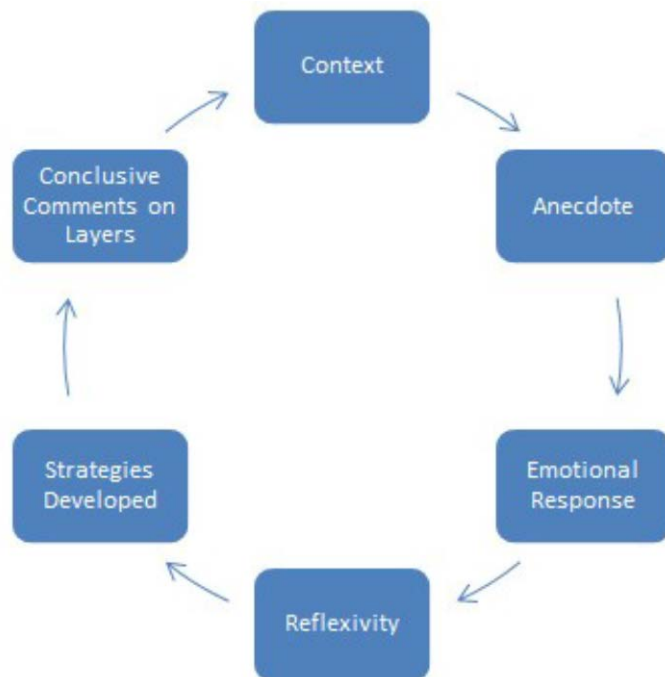
Figure 2: The framework for my layered accounts

My framework is consistent with previous models of reflection, such as Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985), Driscoll (2007) and Gibbs (1998), but is distinguished from these models by building on the notion of the layered account, using multiple voices and placing greater emphasis on the importance of context and historicality, prior to situating the reflective moment within the anecdote using Van Manen's (2014) criteria. The anecdotes are written in the first person to capture the pre-reflective moment, and focus on the emotional response rather than the thinking response. My framework relies on listening to the internal dialogue during the reflexivity phase to reveal the unconscious. It uses reflexivity to expand understanding of an interaction between the researcher and the culturally different other. It offers an opportunity to develop strategies to transform future interactions into more positive experience as it directs the researcher in questioning assumptions based on taken for granted attitudes.

In order to capture as closely as possible the pre-reflective experience in my vignettes, I used my journal entries as a springboard to create a trance-like state in which I propelled myself back in time to the actual experience, the point of contact. I allowed the vision to flow, capturing the essence of body language, facial expressions, physical sensations such as a racing heart and altered spatial awareness. This process was supported variously by my notes from the end of each day on my teaching strategy, photographs, emails. At the commencement of most days as a group we would list on the whiteboard what we hoped to achieve for the day and I would photograph the whiteboard for my records. I would photograph the whiteboard at the end of the

day along with mind maps drawn noting any discrepancies which had arisen during the course of the day.

3.4.2 Case Study

Balancing my experience with the student experience, to gain a deeper understanding of the two-way cultural impact, required a different approach. For me, as the researcher, the students became the 'other', the culturally different. The students on the other hand were not only dealing with me as the 'other', the culturally different, they were placed in a culturally different world in which everything and every way of being took on the mantle of the 'other'. Seeking to understand the world in which they had been plunged became their process of survival. To gain an insight into this process of survival and integration I needed to seek answers to how they reacted to their foreign situation and why they chose the strategies they did to cope with any cultural shock they may have experienced. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of the selected studies, and in this research provided detailed student perspectives of least developed characteristics colliding with a developed environment and teaching style. Case study method aligns with my constructivist approach of a close collaboration between researcher and participant, teacher and student.

Case studies are usually undertaken to reveal findings of relevance beyond the individual cases. My purpose was not to generalise about students' adaptation but rather to gain a consensus from the group about what were the major issues and then to study individuals to add depth to my understanding of the coping strategies adopted by individuals. To achieve this depth of analysis, my case study design included an initial focus group conducted with all students, followed by an invitation for four volunteers to be interviewed individually. The focus group enabled a deeper understanding of the group dynamics that may have affected individual student's perceptions, information processing and decision making (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). The focus group had the benefit of encouraging all students to recall the issues which affected their adaptation to study in Australia and the building of their relationship with the teacher. A case study approach inclusive of a focus group was a choice of data collection designed to prevent ethnocentric interpretations of the qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to provide a balance between the voice of the teacher (autoethnography) and the voice of all the students.

I anticipated that the four volunteers for individual interviews may be the students with most confidence in their English language skills and yet the students with least expertise in English may well be the ones with the most issues in adapting to learning in Australia. In order to include these students with the least expertise in English language skills, I designed the focus group to allow for discussion amongst individuals and small groups. This strategy had been effective with the students in our classroom in Australia, and I felt it could be equally effective in our focus group. Through discussion within the group, sometimes in Tetun to allow all students to participate, memories of physical, emotional and intellectual challenges gathered momentum and inspired deep reflection on how the hardships of living in a different culture affected their ability to learn. Once the students had identified the major issues affecting student adaptation to

learning in Australia , these issues were written on separate pieces of butcher's paper and fastened to the walls within the room. Students were provided with stick-it notes and invited to write their own particular difficulties and coping strategies within those issues and stick them on the butcher's paper under the appropriate headings. I then clustered these difficulties under sub-headings and initiated further discussion by the group as a whole. The analysis of this exercise is discussed in Chapter 6. At the completion of the major issues exercise described above, I conducted a general discussion around the issue of developing a relationship with the teacher and adjusting to communication techniques. These methods of data collection were specifically designed to include all students regardless of their English language skills, to allow for discussion in students' native language amongst themselves, to include some written evidence but only in point form (writing on stick-it notes) and to be inclusive so all students could have a voice.

The proceedings of the focus group took place in the room where student presentations had been conducted in the Dili Institute of Technology (DIT) Boardroom after the students' lunch break. The proceedings were digitally sound recorded but not photographed and my colleague took notes on the activities and collected the artefacts (stick-it notes and butcher's paper). Prior to participating in the focus group, I provided all students with an information sheet informing them of the study's purpose and risks, and that participation was voluntary and confidential. I was careful to impress upon them that they had a choice to leave, to not participate. I understand that my role as their teacher, an authority figure in their culture, may have inhibited their freedom to leave, however I believe I my attempt to give them a choice was the best I could do at the time. I also provided them with a revocation of consent form (Appendix 1). I explained the purpose of these forms and encouraged students to ask questions. They signed a release of materials form consenting to use of photographs of themselves for research outputs (Appendix 1). The focus group and individual interviews took place at the end of the assessment of the students in TL when all students were aware their results had been recorded. I informed them their results would not be affected by their decision to participate or not, and that they could opt out at any time during the focus group or interviews by speaking to me or my colleague, or emailing me directly. They were familiar with my email address and it was provided on the information sheet for them to keep.

Throughout the process of data collection for both the case studies and my autoethnography, I had been mindful of my dual role as teacher and researcher. I was committed to educational practices that served the best interests of my students, to assisting them in their learning and the development of their critical thinking skills (which underpins a student centred pedagogy). I had discussed with the students at length, both at the outset of our relationship when they initially arrived in Australia and leading up to the focus group and interviews, that they were involved in both a learning process and a research process. I believe initially their understanding of their dual role was limited, but as we discussed and practiced critical thinking skills, and researched evidence based learning theories, their understanding of the critical role of collecting data was enhanced. Their enthusiasm for participating in the focus group was a signal to me that they felt researching their experience in order to inform others was an

important part of the overall process. In understanding this, I am reminded that these students, although adults with many years of work and life experience, were confronted with cultural, learning and social issues which affected them deeply. In my dual role as their teacher and researcher, the onus was on me to distinguish which role I was enacting at any given time. I achieved this through constant, open discussion and signifying that assessment had been completed, and the research process begun. Being mindful of ethical issues in conducting the focus group led me to include my colleague, who had travelled to TL with me, but only as a supplementary notetaker in the focus group. Smith (1995) in his seminal article on ethics in focus groups addresses the issue of monitoring stress levels within the focus group and suggests having a co-leader with experience to monitor the group's stress level. My colleague had developed a relationship with the students during their time in Melbourne when she delivered several sessions to them during their course of study. In addition, she had been present over the previous 48 hours during student presentations and had participated in giving students feedback on their project presentations. In accordance with Smith (1995) my colleague acted as note taker and observer, which allowed me the freedom to facilitate the focus group in a purposeful manner and to moderate the process of group dynamics. My skills as a researcher and teacher supported me in probing whilst preserving communal values and privacy, respecting the decision-making capacities of individuals within the group whilst avoiding harm, risk or wrongdoing to any particular participant, and welcoming critical feedback even if it led to unwanted outcomes (Smith, 1995). The research questions which guided the design of the focus group are listed below:

(a)   What practices did students develop to cater for the cultural differences they experienced in the program?

(b)   How was the relationship with students perceived to be fostered by the Australian teacher educator?

(c)   How did the students adapt to learning in a new environment? What coping strategies did they develop to enhance their learning potential?

(d)   How did the students adapt to communication techniques used? How did the students cope with the interaction required for group and independent learning?

(e)   What plans did the students develop for implementation on return to TL of what they learned in the program?

Directly following the focus group I invited four students to volunteer to be interviewed. The group discussed this request amongst themselves and four students agreed, with the consent of the group, to be interviewed. At this stage it was the second day of assessment and the students had spent the afternoon involved in the focus group. It was agreed the interviews would take place the following day. Three of the students came to my hotel to be interviewed at separate times. The interviews took place in the garden of the hotel in a relaxed atmosphere. The fourth student interviewee offered to take my colleague and me to see his training

institution and then drove us further along the coast to the newest tourist resort in TL. It was there that he chose to be interviewed, overlooking the coastline just outside Dili. This was his choice and my colleague excused herself to go for a walk while this interview took place.

The research questions which guided the semi-structured interviews are listed below:

(a)   What cultural differences can you identify between Australia and TL? How did you cater for these cultural differences? What practices did you develop to help you overcome these cultural differences?

(b)   Did you notice your teacher developing relationships with you as your study progressed? What did your teacher do to assist in developing these relationships?

(c)   What difficulties can you identify in your learning in a different cultural environment? How did you deal with these difficulties? What strategies did you develop to enhance your learning potential?

(d)   What communication techniques did your teacher use (i) to communicate with you (ii) to encourage you to communicate with each other? How did these communication techniques used to communicate with you differ to communication techniques used in TL? How did these communication techniques used to encourage you to communicate with each other differ from those used in TL? How effective was the communication with your teacher and with each other? Did you feel isolated at any time? How did you cope with this feeling of isolation? Did this feeling of isolation hinder your progress with your study?

(e)   What plans did you develop for your return to your work in TL? How did you envisage you would use your new learning? Do you feel you were successful in implementing these plans? How has the new knowledge assisted you in your work? Have you experienced any hindrances in sharing your new knowledge with your work colleagues?

The tools I used to collect data for these case studies include semi-structured interviews, direct observation, formal assessment work including their final project report, and visual expressions of their learning such as photos, drawings, mind maps, and student journal writing. The semi-structured interviews were recorded via digital recorder and transcribed into a digital file, which was stored on my laptop. I also took detailed notes during the interviews, which included contextual notes such as body language and facial expressions. To record direct observation and group work observation, I established a journal in which I recorded daily observations and anecdotes. Formal assessment work was submitted to me via email and I established separate files for each student on my laptop. Visual expressions of their learning were collected at the end of each day with photos to record mind maps drawn on whiteboards. Student journal writing was submitted via email and stored in student files on my laptop. I backed up each file on an external hard drive which I kept in a locked filing cabinet. In analysing the data I looked for themes in their experiences which indicated a co-relation between their individual experiences

and their group experience. I examined, categorized and looked for themes in the student feedback (Yin, 2010). I searched for patterns in the data collected through my observation and the artefacts resulting from our classroom learning. The student experiences proved to be common in the focus group, with most in agreement on several key topics. This allowed me to manipulate the data under headings using tables produced in MSWord without the need for specialised software programs. Using theme headings, I copied and pasted under themed headings the relevant comments and quotes from the focus group and interviews. Figure 3 below provides a visual record of how the data was sorted to contribute to the overarching portrait of student cultural adaptation.
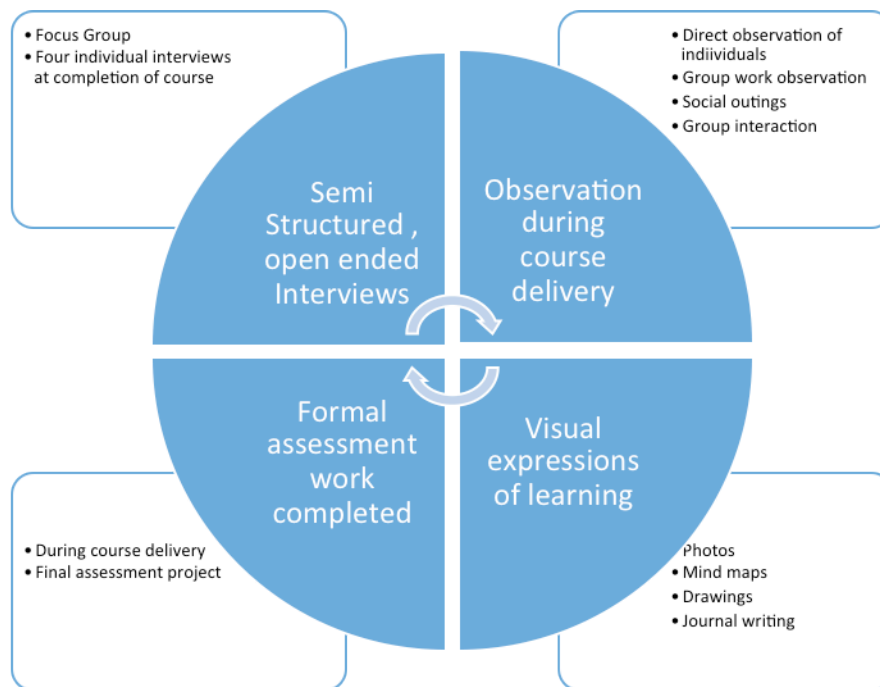
Figure 3: Detail of data categorisation

According to Yin (2009), the strength of the case study method is its ability to examine, in-depth, a case within its real-life context. Yin (2003) prescribes the use of a case study approach when how and why questions need to be answered in a context where the behaviour of those involved cannot be manipulated and where the context of the phenomena are very important to the study.

Yin (2003) suggests that placing boundaries on a case study can prevent it from becoming too broad. Stake (2005, p. 445) agrees stating "the more the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system, the greater the usefulness of the epistemological rationales". For this reason, I adopted a multiple case study of the group as a whole over the period the students were in Australia followed by four students focusing on their personal experiences of adapting to study in Australia. How this selection of four students for case studies was made will be discussed below in the Methods section. Yin (2003) describes multiple case studies as more robust and reliable when seeking to explain phenomena within the same context.

Another key strength of the case study method involves using multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process (Yin, 2009). This ensures the case is explored through multiple lenses allowing manifold features of the phenomena to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Accepting that knowledge is socially constructed, Stake discusses triangulation in terms of "diversity of perception, even the multiple realities within which people live" (Stake, 2005, p. 455). He suggests that readers perceive a case study according to their own life experience and assumptions, and this is compounded by the selective reporting of the case study, reflecting the researcher's perception of the case being studied. Through using multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process, case study researchers "assist readers in the construction of knowledge" (Stake, 2005, p. 455). Stake (2005, p. 447) suggests case researchers should portray and gather data on:

1.   The nature of the case, particularly its activity and functioning;
2.   Its historical background;
3.   Its physical setting;
4.   Other contexts, such as economic, political, legal, and aesthetic;
5.   Other cases through which this case is recognized; and
6.   Those informants through whom the case can be known.

This gathering of a wide array of data seeks the particular in a case, rather than attempting to generalise the case alongside other similar cases. Stake calls this an 'intrinsic case study ' where the study is undertaken to gain a better understanding of this particular case. In 'all its ordinariness' (Stake, 2005, p. 445) this case itself is of interest. My use of a case study approach for the second part of this research aims to explore how the students coped with learning in a different culture and why they chose the strategies they did to adapt to their new learning environment.

3.4.3   Semi-structured, open-ended interviews and focus group

In this research I present data taken from the focus group and semi-structured interviews of four students which represent their views on the cultural differences they identified, and I also comment on (interpret) their representation based on what I have observed. I distinguish these two representations by labelling my comments as 'author's comments'. Yin (2010, p. 12) describes the use of open-ended interviews "to reveal how case study participants construct reality and think about situations". In my semi-structured open-ended interviews the students' construction of reality provides important insights into their coping mechanisms to deal with cultural difference. My interpretation of how I witnessed their coping mechanisms adds depth from the perspective of their learning progression. The separation of student perspective and teacher perspective is made clear in my writing through the use of the label 'author's comments'.

3.4.4   Direct observation during course delivery

Whilst the students were under my tutelage I had many opportunities for direct observation of their coping mechanisms within the learning environment, both with each other and when interacting with guest presenters. This direct observation over time provided the opportunity for me to be sceptical about reactions and mannerisms produced in different contexts and situations, and to test them against rival explanations (Yin, 2010). These observations were recorded in my journal at the end of each day of teaching.

3.4.5 Informal group discussions

During the course of our learning together there were many occasions when the line between formal learning and informal group discussion was blurred. This is part of the Socratic method of learning. Using probing questions to promote deep thinking from the students often led to observations from them about the differences in ways of doing things in TL and Australia. These informal group discussions were insightful and often produced moments of transformational learning about each other's cultures. These observations were also recorded in my journal at the end of each day of teaching.

3.4.6 Visual expressions of learning

The students produced many artefacts during their learning experience such as mind maps, photos, journal entries and drawings. In addition, those students who produced more detailed final assessment project reports gave insights into their cultural heritage and how this heritage assisted them to come to an understanding of their own learning style. These artefacts were extremely valuable in identifying the progression of their learning journey. With the students' permission I took photos of artefacts developed within the classroom and stored these on my computer for use in this research. I also gained permission to refer to two students' final research reports at my discretion.

Yin (2010) discusses three methods of presenting the observational evidence: one where the author tries to remain neutral and factual, another where the presentation of the evidence represents the view of the one or more of the participants and a third method which represents the author's deliberate interpretation of what has been observed. According to Yin a representation of two of these methods is acceptable provided there is clarification of which method is in use. I use evidence as it represents the view of one or more of the participants and I add my interpretation of what I have observed and what has been represented in the artefacts of the students.

3.5   CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have presented the process I undertook to assist me in clarifying my position as a researcher. I used four questions to assist me to present my positioning clearly to the reader. What do I believe underpins my knowledge of life? Where did I gain this belief? How does this belief influence the way I react to situations and people? What assumptions have I accumulated from my life experiences which may affect my reflexivity to social interaction? These questions were helpful in choosing my methods, as I discovered that I wanted to speak from my heart, to demonstrate the way I use intuition in my professional work as well as in my personal life. Both Hall's work on high and low context cultures, and Hofstede's models of collectivism/ individualism and power distance, informed my imperative to undertake a hermeneutic phenomenological study. I like Heidegger's concept of co-constitutionality in hermeneutic phenomenology, which focuses on seeking out the meanings of individual experiences and how these meanings influence the choices we make. Within this hermeneutic phenomenological study, my two-part (teacher and students), dual method (autoethnography and case study) conceptual framework is appropriate, where the meanings arrived at by the researcher are a merging of the meanings articulated by both participant and researcher within the focus of the inquiry (Koch, 1995). Having described and justified my choice of methods to present the different sets of data to give balance to the development of the teacher-student relationship, in the following chapter I move on to building the profile of the students. Providing balance in knowing the participants in this research is an important aspect of the rigour and reliability of this research process.

CHAPTER 4: STUDENT PROFILES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Stake (2005, p. 447) suggesting researchers should portray and gather data on the nature of a case study, its historical background, physical setting and economic, political, legal and aesthetic contexts, as well as those informants through whom the case can be known, this chapter will portray a student profile of each member of the group.

Figure 4: The students on a weekend outing. One of the students took the photo. All students signed a Release of Materials form giving consent to this reproduction.

Sourcing candidates to fulfil the scholarships to study in Australia was a process that required due consideration. Towards the end of 2011 the university unsuccessfully endeavoured to recruit suitable candidates for the GCVET through an Australian agent in TL. This endeavour was hindered by a lack of knowledge of which key personnel were crucial to the building of a TVET infrastructure in TL. The agent advertised the scholarships and received several un-

vetted applications which he put forward to the university. Deeming the process and the applications to be unsatisfactory, the university sought the assistance of the Labour and Education Attaché in the TL Embassy in Canberra, who was an alumnus of the university. He organised for candidates to be put forward by the Secretary of State for Vocational Training and Employment in TL. Of these ten candidates, one withdrew due to ill health. As there was approved funding for twelve candidates, the university agreed for two candidates from DIT to be included and I asked for one of the original applicants through the Australian agent to be included. This applicant had been corresponding with me via email and had impressed me with her determination and enthusiasm. The employment backgrounds of these twelve candidates are listed below in Table 5. The key for IELTS scoring is contained in Table 6.

Table 5: Student Profiles							
Pseudonym	Organisation	Position	Highest Qualification	Previous Study outside TL	English level self identified	IELTS identified English level	Age
Paulo	Training Centre (the government's first accredited training provider)	Director of Training Centre	Diploma in Training and Assessment	Indonesia Australia	High	5.5	40
Adelino	Training Centre in Hospitality and Building and Construction (accredited)	Director of Training Centre	Diploma of Nursing Cert Ed Training Management	No previous study outside TL	Medium	4.5	59
Nicolau	Training Centre, Dili (accredited)	Director of Training	Degrees in Philosophy and Theology	Jakarta	Medium	5	35
Jose	ETDA Training Centre, Dili (accredited)	Project Manager, Training	Degree in Engineering	Bandung, Indonesia Australia	Medium	5	36
Cathi	Training Centre Baucau (non-accredited)	Director of Training	Cert IV Teaching and Learning	Indonesia Switzerland	Low	3	46
Konis	Dili Institute of Technology (DIT)	Program Manager (Building and Construction)	Cert IV AWT Cert II Building	Indonesia	Medium	5	42
Lafu	Dili Institute of Technology	Program Manager (Automotive)	Degree in Mechanical Engineering	Indonesia Malaysia	Medium	4.5	29
Carla	National Directorate for Employment (Government Agency)	Senior Program Officer (Policy Maker)	Diploma	No previous study outside TL	High	4	35

Table 5: Student Profiles							
Pseudonym	**Organisation**	**Position**	**Highest Qualification**	**Previous Study outside TL**	**English level self identified**	**IELTS identified English level**	**Age**
Erin	Learning Resource Development Centre (Government Agency)	Trainer and Resource Manager	Degree in Political Science	No previous study outside TL	Reading High Medium other	4.5	27
Antonio	INDMO (TL's Training Authority) (Government Agency)	Senior Project Officer (Policy Maker)	Cert IV TAA	No previous study outside TL	Medium	5	28
Bernardo	DNAFOP (National Directorate of Vocational Training) (Government Agency)	Senior Technical Officer (Policy Maker)	Diploma of Electronics	Australia one month	Basic	3	38
Francisco	Cabinet of the Secretariat of State of SEFOPE (Government Agency)	Human Capital Development Fund Project Manager	Degree in Information Systems	Indonesia	Medium	4	33

Table 6: IELTS Scoring	
IELTS score averaged	**Category**
5.5/6	Advanced
5/5.5	Upper Intermediate
4.5/5	Intermediate
3.5/4	Pre Intermediate
3	Elementary

Of these twelve, four had not previously studied outside TL. The other eight had variously travelled to Indonesia, Australia, Switzerland and Malaysia for study or conferences. Seven students were employed in training centres either as managers or teacher/managers and five worked for government agencies. Included in the group were a priest and a nun. Some of the group were married with children and others single. Ten were from Dili and two from Baucau which is a city approximately two hour's drive east of Dili, the travel time being dependant on road conditions. The road is unmade and includes significant potholes which can be difficult to navigate during the wet season, however these two students travelled often to Dili.

Following is a profile of each student as per the table above, commencing with the seven students working in training centres and concluding with the five students working for government agencies. I have provided profiles of all 12 students because my methodology includes an autoethnography describing my experiences with all twelve students, as well as a focus group in which eleven of the twelve students participated, plus four case studies. Direct quotations from student data are presented in italics.

4.2   STUDENT 1 – PAULO

His smile lit up his face as he recognised me from a photograph I had previously emailed to the group. Large, white, even teeth were revealed through his parted lips. Keen, brown eyes shone out of his wide, intelligent face and instantly I felt at ease with him. He greeted me in proficient English, temporarily allaying my fears of communication difficulties with the students. I would later come to understand his proficiency in English stemmed from his marriage to an Australian and his previous study in Australia. He had a sturdy build but was not tall, giving him a presence of strength and dependability. Paulo became a spokesperson for the group early in their study but reneged on this position over time as his attention to his study and to the group ebbed and flowed. Paulo, in his interview with me at the end of the course expressed regret for not maximising the opportunity presented to him through study in Australia.

During his twelve week stay in Australia he was distracted by a visit from his wife, who was visiting her family in Western Australia. Around this time he suffered some ill health and had severe pain in his back causing him to miss some extra days of scheduled attendance. In addition to these absences, he was also called back to TL to supervise the enrolment of a large group of students at the training centre where he was the Director, causing him to miss another week of his study. Paulo carried with him prior experience of studying, a qualification which he failed to complete and successfully completed subsequent qualifications.

In the early 1990s Paulo studied a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering in Indonesia for two years but failed to complete the final year. In 2002 he commenced employment with his current training centre as an office administrator and later operations manager. In 2007 he was appointed director. Between 2007 and 2009 he successfully studied for a Certificate IV and Diploma in Training and Assessment through a partnership between an Australian university and Dili Institute of Technology. When I visited his training centre during my first trip to TL I was struck by his easy manner and his familiarity with everyone he encountered within his centre, whilst proudly showing me the facilities offered to his staff and students. He knew the name of most of the students and the staff greeted him warmly and with respect.

I noticed a change in attitude after the period of his absence from the GCVET group, which appeared to stem from a decline in interest. He continued to attend but his participation lacked the enthusiasm he had demonstrated earlier in the course. His presentation for his final assessment was informative but inadequate, as it did not address all the assessment criteria for the GCVET. My previous knowledge of his valuable work at his training centre prompted me to assess him on additional evidence through observation and verification produced as part of his

work at his training centre. I visited his centre for the second time the day after final presentations were completed and viewed his documentation for the planning, supervision and assessment of the UNESCO group of students he had left Australia to enrol towards the end of his study. His record keeping, decision making and resources developed, provided the evidence to support his assessment. I also observed the students in action and I was left with no doubt in my mind that transformational learning was taking place within his training centre.

I returned to TL with a colleague to assess the students on a Sunday evening in June 2013. Paulo collected my colleague and me from the airport and proudly invited us to a community event at the recently built Dili Mall. We arrived to a big crowd gathered outside an exhibition area. Paulo introduced us to his wife, and his cousins, uncles, and aunts. The event was organised to profile the village where Paulo had been born. His uncle had the position of leadership equivalent to a mayor and as he addressed the large crowd Paulo translated for us. Those gathered greeted Paolo with warmth and respect and in turn he greeted them confidently and introduced us with pleasure on his face. Tribal dancing entertained the gathered crowd and Paulo drew us inside the exhibition area to view photographs of his ancestors and the area of Timor where he grew up. His position as a person of substance within his community was manifested by the recognition he received from the several hundred people present.

4.3   STUDENT 2 – MR ADELINO

Everything about Mr Adelino expressed a grave respect for courtesy. As the oldest member of the group at 59, he hung at the back of the cluster at the airport and only nodded his head with a light smile as I reached out to shake his hand. The group addressed him with the respectful term of 'Mr' to indicate their recognition of his senior years. His swarthy complexion and grey curly hair set him apart from the others, not just because of his age but also because he appeared more Portuguese than his colleagues. He acknowledged himself as Portuguese by writing his CV in both Portuguese and English, identifying Portuguese as his first language and Indonesian Bahasa as his second. Having been born in 1953, well before the Indonesian incursion in 1975, there was a strong Portuguese influence in his education, unlike the rest of the cohort who received their education under an Indonesian regime.

I too immediately commenced calling him Mr Adelino and he eventually called me Jayne. If he had understood I was older than him he may well have been embarrassed at that. Such was his nature.

He was currently the director of a training centre in a district of Dili. The centre had been administered by the Portuguese Government but this tenure of administration was coming to an end and Mr Adelino was overseeing the transition from Portuguese administration to TL administration. This indicated a new era for the training centre and in a country like Australia this might have called for a new, younger administration to bring change to the centre, but such was the respect for Mr Adelino and the need of the TL Government for experienced staff, that he was leading the change. His project for assessment in the GCVET was centred on the transition of his training centre.

After completing a Diploma of Nursing, Mr Adelino worked as a nurse before progressing to health administration, with a focus on computers and health records. He joined the Ministry of Education and eventually became the Director of his Training Centre in 2008. He completed a Diploma in Training and Assessment with an Australian university in TL in 2008.

I acknowledge his lack of English language skills as an impediment to my ability to know him well and to understand the level of his learning. His written English was more advanced than his spoken English but his formal approach to writing disallowed spontaneity, denying me windows into whether transformational learning was taking place for him. His diligence and his formal approach to his writing and assessment work indicated commitment but his tendency to focus on rules and regulations for the new administration of his training centre left me wondering whether imposing these regulations was more important to him than transformational learning for the students within the centre. The need for regulations to help build the TVET infrastructure within TL was apparent, but the emphasis on student outcomes, though by no means absent, seemed to be secondary. Mr Adelino enjoyed group work which afforded him the opportunity for discussion in Bahasa and deepen his understanding although I would never use the term 'animated' to describe his participation in these discussions. However in his final presentation Mr Adelino demonstrated that he had undertaken research whilst in Melbourne which supported the regulations he had developed for the new administration of his training centre.

4.4   STUDENT 3 – NICOLAU

Spirituality in its concept of the praxis and process of personal transformation, of psychological and emotional growth, attracts me; it beckons to me, and it speaks to me. At 35 years of age, Nicolau with his earnest face and soulful eyes exuded spirituality. Born in a small village about five hours drive southeast of Dili, in a district which has a large cathedral, school and seminary, Nicolau entered the priesthood at a young age, encouraged by his family. He studied theology in Manila and philosophy in Jakarta. As a priest, he was openly treated with respect by fellow students. In the beginning they addressed him as 'Father' but as familiarity grew, Nicolau asked to be addressed by his given name. He was always courteous, helpful and committed to his study.

Nicolau was ecstatic upon learning about evidence based practice, as the concept made good sense to him. His introduction to learning theories left him questioning the usefulness of such theory, because at this stage he had not made the connection of theory to practice. When that connection became apparent to him, his face shone with enlightenment and he could not satiate his appetite for learning. His English language skills were good and I often used him to translate a complex concept into Tetun so that the whole class could better understand. He indicated to me that he took this responsibility with delight, as he felt like he was a bridge between the learning and his classmates. About four weeks into our time together, I noticed Nicolau become more sombre. His ready smile was not so frequent and his dark eyes looked sad. I also noticed that he had become very thin. It was at this time that I appointed him a mentor within the university, a man whose background included a Degree in Philosophy. Nicolau was invited into the home of this man and his wife and I felt confident that I had made a good match. Nicolau

enjoyed the company of his mentor but continued to look troubled. It was some time after Nicolau returned to TL at the end of our twelve weeks together in Melbourne that he told me he had made the decision to leave the priesthood. This decision cost him the support of his father and he felt banished by his whole village. He lost his position as director of the training centre where he had been teaching for many years. His life changed dramatically. He had no income, no employment and nowhere to live. He relied on friends. One of his co-students heard of his plight and offered him a temporary part-time teaching role at his training centre.

Nicolau contacted me to say he could not complete his assignment project as planned because he was no long the director of a training centre. We agreed instead that he should complete a major project based on learning theories in practice. He revealed in his final interview with me that he had been considering his future life well before he arrived in Australia. In fact he had twice before indicated to his superiors and his father that he wished to leave the priesthood. Each time he allowed himself to be persuaded to remain. His stated his experience of student centred learning in Melbourne had empowered him to acknowledge his unhappiness and his right to advocate for and determine his own future.

4.5   STUDENT 4 – JOSE

Diminutive in size and BIG on personality, Jose dressed with flair. He wore a gold chain on his wrist and interesting shoes. Initially Jose was an enigma to me. His broad smile across prominent teeth defined his friendliness but a reserve in his demeanour forewarned me that he was not convinced that I was cool and that this whole study thing wasn't going to be a repeat of what he had already conquered. He had lived in Australia for four months several years previously whilst undertaking a Diploma of Training and Assessment at Box Hill TAFE and I sensed this gave him the authority to be laid back about another study trip to Australia. He had completed a Degree in Engineering in Indonesia but his position as Project Manager of Training at his training centre in Dili allowed him to diversify from engineering to influence the selection of courses offered to students, thereby impacting the provision of skilled labour to build the economy in TL. The students who came to the training centre where he worked were unemployed, displaced youth searching for a direction which would provide employment in a turbulent economy. I had visited the training centre on my first visit to Dili and understood that the centre offered youth a place to gather, to play basketball to pass the time and to establish a sense of belonging to a community. The task of converting this youth contact into productive skill development was a huge undertaking and Jose indicated in every respect that he was dedicated to his role in Dili and that he did not want to waste his time in Australia.

Jose's intense intelligence saw him flit from excitement to frustration quite easily. In the first week of our classes he became animated and effusive as I explained the concept of critical analysis and he quickly understood how this could be applied in practice. His display of frustration was borne of having to wait for his classmates to catch up before we could move forward in our learning. He was a leader in learning but did not take a leadership role within the group. He was generous in contributing to the explanations of concepts and often translated

what he was learning into Tetun so his classmates could keep apace. Rather than this emanating from leadership I think it was testament to his need to move the group on so he could learn more, as quickly as possible. His extroverted personality ensured he became a well-known figure around the university, especially amongst the Timorese community. His appointed mentor, who was the Manager of Hospitality and Tourism Training, demonstrated the on-the-job training facilities at the university in a state of the art training restaurant, which was open to staff of the university and the public. Captivated by this idea, Jose planned to build a similar facility at his training centre in Dili. When I returned to Dili in 2013 to assess student projects, Jose's training restaurant and an accompanying conference centre were in the final stages of completion. The difficulties which had to be overcome in building this facility were enormous, including having to run joined extension leads over 300 metres of muddy ground to a distant building to access electricity, providing a single source of power for those working on the building site. The series of photos below follow the extension cord propped on poles running over vacant land, over a fence, along the ground, up the stairwell of the new building, providing a power board for tradesmen to draw electricity from.

Image copyright Jayne Pitard 2013

Figure 5: Electrical source on Jose's building project

Two years later and Jose has established a Facebook page for his training centre and proudly posts photos of student achievements in tourism and hospitality training. Not long after returning

to TL from Australia, Jose made an appointment to see the Minister for Education in TL to stress the importance of introducing critical analysis into the school curriculum. He was appointed by the Government to deliver management training to hundreds of department staff and to advise the Minister on the capability of those staff. His impact in helping to build the education infrastructure in TL is well signposted.

4.6   STUDENT 5 – CATHI

Staring at me intently, but with shyness in her eyes, Cathi smiled uncertainly. She lingered at the back of the group. She wore a nun's veil and tunic in white, trimmed with blue. I moved forward to shake her hand. She confided in me at a later date that she thought I looked kind but her lack of English skills prevented her from putting herself forward. Cathi is the subject of Vignette 6 in my Autoethnography (Developing Strategies) where I came to the realisation that I had not heard Cathi speak English. She had previously travelled and studied in Switzerland but her English skills remained basic. We had participated in email correspondence when she first applied to be a member of this group in the university's first attempt to recruit candidates through an agent in TL. When the university instead approached the Education Attaché at the TL Embassy in Canberra, I campaigned to have Cathi included in the final group of twelve. Our previous email communication had been through an intermediary, a German woman financed by a grant from the United Nations to assist at Cathi's training centre in Baucau, where Cathi was the Director. Baucau is a two to three hour drive from Dili. Cathi's persistence had impressed me and I felt she would dedicate herself to her study. I was not disappointed, however her lack of English language skills proved a greater obstacle than either she or I could anticipate. At the time of final assessment when a project report had to be written, Cathi was floundering. She eventually sought my permission for the German intermediary to translate her report from Tetun into English. I sought advice from academic colleagues who advised me to get a signed, written statement that the report was Cathi's own work. As the Director of a training centre, specifically established to train women towards economic independence, Cathi's project was to gain registration for her training centre to deliver nationally accredited courses. The centre had previously been teaching women hospitality, sewing and soap making, and their products had been distributed in Australia through various Rotary Clubs. The training centre needed to prove its governing structure and Memorandum of Understanding could be upheld and that staff were committed. The strain of ensuring teachers were appropriately qualified, developing adequate course delivery plans and preparing appropriate learning resources for Certificate I in Hospitality, cost Cathi a staff member. This was devastating as qualified teachers are difficult to find in Baucau. One of the huge advantages of bringing this group of TL TVET professionals together was the professional development they could offer each other through sharing their knowledge of the systems in TL. The officers with responsibility for registration of training centres and course accreditation in the TL Government were members of this study group. They guided Cathi throughout the process and their support was invaluable to the success of her project.

4.7   STUDENT 6 – KONIS

My lasting impression of Konis is at the airport stuffing electrical goods into his suitcase as he departed Australia. The electric iron caused consternation amongst airline staff when his bag was being weighed but he had no hesitation in paying for excess baggage. An iron in TL is considered a prize and his wife would be thrilled. Konis also lived and worked in Baucau. He was one of the two members of the group put forward by DIT and he managed the School of Building and Construction at the Baucau campus. Konis was a quiet achiever with a noticeable tick in his face when nervous, especially when contributing to class discussion or making a presentation. His voice was low and deep and he often cleared his throat several times before speaking. He grew in confidence as the course progressed and became a leader during periods of group learning, especially in relation to course preparation and delivery. His expertise in teaching was helpful to other students. I coupled him with a mentor in the university's building and construction department where he immersed himself as often as possible to watch and learn. He too was impressed with the on-site training facilities within the university and chose, for his assignment project, to design and build an on-site training facility in Baucau for DIT. At the time of final assessment in 2013 his facility was nearing completion. Such was his grasp of work-as-learning that he had employed his students to assist in the design and building of the facility and assessed them on the job. These students gained their qualification through on-site training coupled with classroom theory. This was a new concept to Konis and he grasped it quickly.

An interesting episode highlighted Konis' inherent self-efficacy, despite his outward signs of nervousness. The university was closing a campus which had housed a building and construction training facility and the fixtures and fittings had become surplus to needs. One of the Directors of that campus who was mentor to Nicolau, and consequently familiar with my program, asked if any of my students would be interested in taking the surplus fixtures and fittings back to TL. Konis expressed interest but the problem of transporting this equipment to Baucau became an issue. Serendipitously, the Director who offered the equipment had a meeting with a member of the local Rotary Club and mentioned this problem to him. The Rotarian offered his club support to transport the equipment to TL and a meeting with Konis was arranged. When Konis saw the Rotarian he stiffened and went red in the face. He expressed displeasure to me and I walked outside with him seeking an explanation. Co-incidentally this person had previously offered assistance to Konis, but neither he nor Konis expected to be meeting on this day. Konis explained to the Director and myself that this particular Rotarian in his previous offer of help, had placed unacceptable conditions on his offer, which Konis felt had insulted his ability to manage his own centre.

4.8   STUDENT 7 – LAFU

Earnest in his willingness to please, to learn, to be of assistance, Lafu was dependable in switching off the lights, locking up the classroom, offering to help me carry my laptop and books. His face shining from perspiration, I could imagine the cogs turning in his brain as he sought to understand a problem or provide an answer to a complex question. He had previously studied in both Indonesia and Malaysia and was currently a Project Manager in automotive at DIT. He had

intermediate level English skills but I found difficulty in understanding his accent. Often he would proffer an answer to a question posed in the classroom and I would have to ask him to repeat his answer several times before another student would kindly intervene and help me to understand what he was saying. This did bother him, as often his face would turn red as I was trying to decipher his contribution but, to his credit, he did not allow this to diminish his enthusiasm. His final assessment project was a complex restructuring of his assessment resources within the automotive department at DIT. At the time of student presentations in June 2013, Lafu was studying a Masters Degree in a remote part of Indonesia and he travelled for three days to attend DIT in Dili to make his presentation. Such was his commitment. I told him if he had explained to me the complicated journey he had to take to attend the presentations, I would have accepted his by email, but he was adamant he wanted to be with the group to hear each individual presentation so he could continue to learn.

4.9   STUDENT 8 – CARLA

Unwilling to pry into my students' private lives, it took me several weeks to comprehend that Carla had left behind in TL her three small children and husband. She explained her mother and her grandmother were caring for her children while her husband worked. Her fragile, serious demeanour belied the strength involved in leaving a husband and children for three months, confronting a new culture with its different weather and customs, and studying in a language in which she was not proficient. Her IELTS Grading was 4 (pre-intermediate) which explained the furrowed brow as she struggled to decipher my words. In addition, she was sharing an apartment with the other two females in the group, Cathi a nun who spoke little English and Erin who was much younger and unmarried. Carla worked in the TL Government's small business start-up unit and her role was to assess businesses and allocate funding. Her mission in Melbourne was to examine our government's small business annual re-assessment program to see if it could be adapted for TL. On her return to TL she would be managing the implementation of this program which would form part of her assessment for the GCVET. Carla is the student mentioned in Vignette 14 in Chapter 5, whose final project presentation produced expressions of pleasure from her colleagues. Not only were they overjoyed at her ability to present and evaluate the data she had gathered for her presentation, but they admired her composure and clarity of expression which they believe she did not possess on her arrival in Australia. Carla's wide smile indicated she too was proud of her achievement.

4.10   STUDENT 9 – ERIN

Despite being diminutive, Erin's broad face and appealing smile distinguished her within the group. She was a quiet student who preferred to wait until asked before offering contributions to class discussions, however as she gained confidence, both in speaking English and in contributing to class discussions, she displayed a keen intelligence indicated by probing questions. With a degree in political science gained in TL, her role in Timor with a government agency was to develop training and learning resources to support the delivery of national qualifications. Her final presentation for assessment was outstanding, with carefully composed slides depicting the work she had been undertaking since her return to TL. Her slide presentation was fast paced and she spoke from the heart without the assistance of notes. Her reference to the underpinning learning theories, which influenced the design of her training programs, plainly demonstrated the learning in which she invested so much pride. Erin arrived at the airport to farewell my colleague and me on the morning of our final departure from TL. Petite herself, she was accompanied by a strikingly tall young man who she introduced as her boyfriend. As I shook hands with him his eyes rested on Erin gently as she turned her face up to his with a wide smile, eyes glowing. Turning to me she explained her boyfriend is on scholarship from an international organisation and is studying to be a doctor in Brazil. This proud expression of achievement confirmed for me the ambition I had perceived in Erin to be the very best she could be while studying in Australia. This couple standing in front of me were the future of TL, and together they emanated a strength of conviction which gave me great hope for the continued development of their country.

4.11   STUDENT 10 – ANTONIO

Antonio worked for the government authority in TL (INDMO) which accredits training providers to deliver national qualifications. His appointed mentor was an officer in the equivalent authority here in Melbourne called the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA). His greatest revelation in studying the work of the VRQA was annual monitoring and evaluation to ensure a training provider maintained the quality required for registration. This system had not been implemented in TL, and funding had not been applied for to ensure the ongoing quality delivery of courses. Antonio's project involved introducing the concept of monitoring and evaluation into processes in TL, to ensure continuing quality of delivery of accredited courses. Antonio's English levels were high and so his communication with his mentor was enhanced by his ability to phrase questions and understand the explanations given to him. His passion for his work was aroused by the discoveries he was making about continuous monitoring, because it made sense to him. He said that one of the major issues faced in TL was that of accredited teachers either taking leave, or moving on to another position, when there was no suitable replacement teacher to relieve them. This often meant the delivery of courses was not of a standard required for the training providers to maintain their status of accreditation, but this was not identified without an annual monitoring and evaluation process in place. His project involved establishing ongoing evaluation of accreditation of training institutes within the TVET infrastructure in TL.

4.12   STUDENT 11 – BERNARDO

An elementary level of English, despite having previously studied in Australia, hindered Bernardo's ability to adapt to the Australian culture. An incident where he was fined for not having used his public transport swipe card highlights the difficulty both he and I had in developing our relationship. One day he approached me after class. My journal notes are below.

His dark skin glowed with perspiration and he showed the whites of his eyes as he earnestly revealed that he had been fined by the transit police for not swiping his prepaid transport card at the train station before boarding the train into the city. I asked him to slow down his heavily accented speech so I could more fully understand what he was telling me. He rolled his eyes in his effort to repeat the terrible news that he had received a fine of $200 and would I please help him because he did not have the money to pay this fine. I asked questions to clarify details. I knew there was no ticketed public transport system in Timor Leste (TL) but I also knew this was not his first travel to Australia. He had previously studied in Australia for one month, and we were in the second week of this visit to Australia. His agitation caused beads of perspiration to form on his forehead and upper lip. I knew he did not have the money to pay this fine. "I will see what I can do". The following Monday morning he approached me again and I felt dismayed I had not taken any action on this matter. When he approached me a week later I felt ashamed I still had not taken any action and immediately wrote a letter to the public transit authority on behalf of the university, outlining his unfamiliarity with a ticketed public transport system and his lack of experience in other cultures. "Have you received a letter yet?" "Do you know if I have to pay this fine?" His agitation continued until the response was received rescinding the fine. His smile reached across his face.

In reading this entry in my journal I questioned why I did not take action on his behalf immediately? It took me two weeks to initiate the letter and my hesitation in helping this student caused me to question my underlying assumptions. He had not given me any reason to believe he had deliberately tried to get a free ride on the train. I had unconsciously based my doubt of his sincerity on the fact that he was a man who was teased by his colleagues for making comments about young women. I had taken selected observable data and formed an assumption of untrustworthiness. At the end of his course of study during the focus group he revealed how absolutely terrified he was when he was apprehended by the transit police. He explained his lack of experience with ticketed public transport meant he genuinely forgot to swipe his card at the train station. Given most suburban train stations in Melbourne do not have barriers which demand a card be swiped, his explanation was plausible. He revealed that his terror led to fears of being gaoled or evicted from Australia. I felt ashamed I had doubted his integrity. I understood I had allowed assumptions about him not respecting young women to influence my reaction to his plight. When I returned to TL with my colleague for the project presentations for their final assessment, it was interesting to note that although he attended,

Bernardo did not have a project presentation ready to present. He pleaded with me to come and see his work, stating that gaining the qualification was extremely important to him and he would feel ashamed if he failed the course. My colleague and I felt compelled to visit his workplace to view the evidence of activities and projects which would indicate his ability to operate at AQF Level 8. This evidence together, with substantial work submitted prior to him leaving Australia, gained him his qualification.

4.13   STUDENT 12 – FRANCISCO

On the last night of my first visit to Dili, I went with my colleagues to a restaurant on the waterfront. Several of the students I was to teach in Australia arrived to introduce themselves to me. Francisco was amongst them. I remember warming to his outgoing personality and discovering his spoken English language skills were encouraging. In TL, Francisco worked directly with the Minister who had responsibility for TVET. He was a project manager for the Human Capital Development Fund and had gained a degree in Indonesia in Information Systems. He often discussed his work, disclosing that he dealt with the media on behalf of the Minister. He was one of the younger members of the group and he is the student featured in two of my vignettes - Vignette 5 and Vignette 10. In each of these vignettes his stories demonstrated sensitivity and intelligence. His commitment to classroom work was evident through his contributions; however he did not submit written work and did not attend the final presentations in TL to complete his qualification. Therefore, he did not participate in the focus group. When I asked him about this via email he said he was too busy at work. Gaining the qualification seemed unimportant to him, however there is also the possibility that he simply had not taken the time to develop a project until it became too late to do so.

4.14 CONCLUSION

In writing these student profiles I became aware that I knew, or had observed, more about some students than about others. This is reflected in the level of information I provide about each student. I believe there were several factors to be considered in this. Language was a barrier where a student had poor English skills, such as Carla and Bernado. However there were others, such as Cathi, whose English skills were low but whose personality and ability to contribute without the use of language, ensured I knew her well. Others, such as Francisco, who had high language levels, remained somewhat unknown due to a perceived lack of interest in completing the qualification. As Francisco did not attend the focus group, my ability to know him will remain untested.

Twelve individuals came to Australia full of hope and fear. Eleven of them were committed and produced the evidence to indicate their learning and ability to work at AQF Level 8 in order to gain the qualification. One chose not to complete. The selection of these individuals to undertake this journey and complete the study in Australia could not guarantee their commitment to the study, however, as a group in Melbourne, they were harmonious and co-operated well with each other. The next chapter presents the first part of my research in the form of my autoethnography, which constitutes fifteen vignettes describing existential crises which impacted my cultural adaptation to teaching these students.

CHAPTER 5:   THE TEACHER – AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

5.1   PART 1 – AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography retrospectively and selectively writes about experiences that have their basis in, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or owning a specific cultural identity. The use of vignettes to examine and analyse lived experiences can provide a window through which the reader can gain an understanding of the insight which comes from placing a person with one cultural identity in a setting where different cultural norms are at play. I have written sixteen individual vignettes, without an overarching narrative. My vignettes provide a layered account of my experience. They follow a format which describes the context of the experience, the actual experience as anecdote (presented in italics), its emotional impact, my reflexivity to the described experience, what strategies I developed as a result of the experience and my concluding comments on the layers described.

I use vignettes to highlight experiences where cultural identity, aligned with my assumptions about the way the world is based on my own cultural identity, affected my decision making when in TL and when teaching the TL students in Melbourne. My vignettes travel in time from my first experience of travelling to TL, through to the students studying in Melbourne and finish with my second visit to TL where I assessed the students. I do not provide a detailed account of my whole experience but rather I have selected experiences which have challenged my basic assumptions on cultural identity and transformed my philosophical stance on teaching students from a least developed country.

My first three vignettes illustrate the confusion I experienced during my first visit to TL in June 2012 when confronted with a different way of being. Vignettes 4 to 13 expose my mistakes and my triumphs in teaching the students when they were in Melbourne between July and October 2012. My last two vignettes describe my experience of travelling to TL for the second time to assess the student projects which would confirm the students' achievement of the GCVET. On this second visit to TL in June 2013 I was accompanied by a university teaching colleague who assisted me in the assessment process.

5.2 VIGNETTE 1 – FIRST IMPRESSIONS

5.2.1 Context

In preparation for receiving my twelve students in Melbourne I travelled to TL for a week in June 2012 with three university personnel who were travelling to TL with the specific purpose of promoting relationships between Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e, Dili Institute of Technology (DIT), the Ministry for Education in TL and various funding bodies in Dili. My companions on this trip were a Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) with responsibility for university relations with TL, a consultant to the university on political and cultural matters in TL and a Director at the university with responsibility for building international student relations. All three had prior experience of travelling to TL. In the three weeks of preparation I had for this trip I attended a meeting with my three travel companions and otherwise had limited email or phone contact. In this time I was able only to develop a peremptory working relationship with them. I had studied the recent history of TL and had developed an understanding of the impact of the Indonesian occupation and withdrawal but this was my first experience as an eyewitness. I was approaching an unknown culture and terrain with relatively unfamiliar travel companions. We were met at the airport by a driver and driven to our hotel.

> *Rubble dominates the street scenes. I have prepared myself for poverty but the site of such destruction deeply affects me. I know the rubble is the result of the obliteration of many buildings and utilities as the Indonesians retreated from Dili in 1999, but still I am shocked. Families have erected hovel dwellings amidst the rubble and I imagine myself waking up each morning to the task of sorting through the rubble to find suitable pieces to rebuild, and then having to remove from the site the unwanted rubble. This is in addition to foraging for food. I understand the weariness in the faces we are passing. I also recognise hope in the domestic scenes flashing by. I see mothers out sweeping the ground with palm fronds around their humble makeshift dwellings. Most of the dwellings have corresponding makeshift washing lines with impeccable white washing being hung out to dry by mothers with naked children clinging to their legs. I witness pride and a desire for cleanliness against the backdrop of poverty. Whilst I am keenly observing the landscape as we drive into Dili, my attention is drawn to our driver as he edges the car dangerously into the middle of an intersection with cars driving at us from all directions. I notice non-functioning traffic lights and marvel as our driver navigates the chaos, and emerges on the other side of the intersection triumphant. We pull up in the dust outside the Dili Beach Hotel. We are opposite the ocean. This brings me comfort in its familiarity amidst the confrontation to my senses of this chaotic, unequal world.*
>
> *It is the destruction embodied in the amount of rubble in the streets that affronts me the most. The deliberate destruction of buildings and homes created during the Indonesian occupation appals me. I feel angry and despairing for these gentle people. It looks like an earthquake has struck the heart of Dili. The drive from the airport has imprinted my mind with shock at both the living conditions and the driving conditions. I*

feel like I will never forget this first impression of Dili. The main roads are bitumen, but most side roads are compacted dirt. I am told that many of the dirt side roads simply dwindle into non-existence where structured building diminishes. There are between six and thirteen sets of traffic lights in Dili, depending on who you ask, most of which have been vandalised by locals. It seems they are satisfied with their own code of driving.

I am told by my colleagues, the Dili Beach Hotel is run by an Australian expat from Darwin and many hotels and restaurants are owned and managed by expats employing local staff. I feel hopeful that this works well for the Timorese as they have the opportunity to learn skills on the job in the hospitality industry. The downside is that the profit has the potential to be taken out of TL. As we enter the hotel I peruse a sparsely furnished reception room where systems for recording guest details appear to be mostly manual. We are taken upstairs to an open air bar and restaurant for guests and the general public. With an outlook over the sea it appears to be a pleasant place to breakfast and meet up with colleagues and other visitors to TL. We are taken to our rooms at the back of the hotel. My room is clean with bare floors and walls. There is a bed and a wardrobe, a TV on the wall, a desk with an internet point and an air conditioning unit forcing out cold air. I have a large, clean private bathroom. I am comfortable but out of my comfort zone. A feeling of despondency descends on me and I don't understand why. I have visited least developed countries previously and feel I have prepared myself well for this experience. I have little time for rumination as I am immediately immersed in our schedule for the week. I am asked to be ready to leave for our first appointment in one hour and to meet the group in the reception area.

5.2.2 Emotional response

I joined the group an hour later harbouring a self-image of inadequacy. As an older adult I considered myself flexible and undemanding yet I looked at this hotel room and felt despondent. On reflection my feeling of despondency did not stem from my reaction to my accommodation but rather to witnessing in person a nation which has been cruelly devastated. Without a familiar, understanding person to whom I could express this impact I felt sensitive and overwhelmed. My colleagues were seasoned TL visitors and their vision was focused forward. I had to fall into step.

5.2.3 Reflexivity

Understanding we had a task to achieve that afternoon I was impressed with the PVC's concerted effort to include me in a briefing as we travelled by taxi to our first meeting. I was on a steep learning curve and slowly came to the understanding that I was being given an opportunity to watch, listen and learn from three senior professionals. I could not allow my despondency to limit my participation in our first meeting, which was also an opportunity for me to contribute to the group dynamics and establish my role within the group.

5.2.4 Strategies developed

With my notebook and pen ready, I participated in the meeting by replicating the greetings my colleagues extended to our hosts and copying their body language. I noted this in my book so I could recall it at will. I noted those in attendance, their titles and their place within their organisation. I listened for signals to discover the intent of our meeting and how their organisation could provide synergies with the university. I encouraged myself to become infected with the buoyancy I noted in my colleagues. I assumed we had a job to do despite the state of the nation. I hadn't yet come to understand we had a job to do because of the state of the nation.

5.2.5 Concluding comments on layers

My first impressions of TL shocked me. I felt affronted that humans could be so violent and destructive towards their fellow human beings. I discovered that poverty and hunger in least developed countries are a very different experience to wilful destruction and killing. The former has a certain predictability about it. The latter shocked me in its reality. The meeting I attended with my colleagues surprised me in its 'business as usual' tone and this helped me to acknowledge the disparity between those exposed to the crimes of war and those seeing them for the first time. I had to leave the novice me behind and adapt to the culture in which I was now immersed.

5.3   VIGNETTE 2 – AN ANGRY TAXI DRIVER (CHALLENGES MY JUDGMENT)

5.3.1 Context

My personal experience during this first contact with TL would shape my continuing experience with the students I had yet to meet. I understood the need to immerse myself in their culture but I also recognised I was resisting fully integrating with the people I was meeting. I felt like I was standing on the outside observing so I could discover a level of understanding, a platform if you like, from which to launch my integration. I experienced professional envy as I perceived my colleagues interacting skilfully, seemingly dealing with cultural difference without faltering, although I also understood they had visited TL on several previous occasions. On one afternoon taxi ride with my colleagues I experienced an interaction that brought me to a point of disturbance where I began to question my own attitude to a culture I would never fully understand.

Our schedule of meetings sometimes required taxi travel between venues. At other times we were driven by a driver from one of the organisations we were visiting. On this particular afternoon we had hailed a taxi to drive us to a destination my colleagues were not familiar with and we were reliant on the taxi driver to find this destination for us. In Dili this is not an easy task as only a few roads are bituminised and have names, and numbers are generally non-existent. Most taxi drivers are familiar with a district name and once they arrive in that district will assist their passenger to find a particular location either through instructions relayed by the institution being visited, or by driving around until they recognise a name on a building. Our taxi

driver had no problem driving us to the district but it took quite some time and needed enquiry of the local people to find the building we were looking for.

5.3.2 Anecdote

From the outset, my colleague in the front passenger seat holds in her hand the 3 U.S. Dollars which seems to be standard fare for most journeys within the central districts of Dili. As we reach our destination after much effort by the driver to locate the building, she proffers the 3 U.S. Dollars as payment. Our driver, who appears to be of African heritage, perhaps Sudanese, gesticulates angrily and communicates in broken English that the building has been difficult to find and we have been in his taxi a long time. He asks for 5 U.S. Dollars. My colleague insists that 3 U.S. Dollars is a standard fare and she will not pay more. The driver's eyes widen, the pitch of his voice rises, and his words become unintelligible as he speaks at a faster pace. He waves his arms wildly to emphasise his dissatisfaction. Afraid the driver might become violent, I lean across from the back seat and push an extra 2 U.S. Dollars into his hand and thank him as I look directly into his eyes. I want to make my thank you heartfelt and sincere to appease him but also to connect with him and to agree with him that he deserves to be paid the extra money. He becomes subdued and we alight from the taxi without any further protest. Nobody comments as I follow the group into the meeting. The colleague who had offered the 3 U.S. Dollars does not say anything directly to me for the rest of the afternoon.

Feeling acutely aware that I may have angered my colleague, I have difficulty concentrating on our discussion as I sift through the repercussions of my actions. I had anticipated a situation where my colleague and the driver might reach a point where neither would step back from the confrontation and I had wanted to avert this possibility. I feel unable to shrug off the sensation that in overriding her decision to pay the driver no more than 3 U.S. Dollars, I have transgressed, badly. Her lack of the need to address me may be the case regardless of my intervention in paying the taxi driver, but I take responsibility in my head as I do not have time to reflect and sort through my feelings.

5.3.3 Emotional response

My reaction was instinctive and based on a mixture of two inconsistent suppositions – that the driver may have become violent confirming my fear of reprisal, and that he is a human being who felt affronted that the extra time and effort he put into assisting us to find our destination was not being rewarded. I had felt apprehensive in the face of the confrontation and feared that physical violence might ensue. I wondered what were the grounds for my fear of physical violence? Was it purely the driver's response or was it his response coupled with his culture. Was it racist on my part to presume he might resort to violence?

5.3.4 Reflexivity and strategies developed

This is a story which could be experienced by anyone in a foreign culture where rules are unknown. It has happened to me on previous visits to least developed countries where I have been uncertain of the norms and felt that I could be taken advantage of because of this inexperience. I was feeling my way carefully as I could have been in jeopardy of breaching common local practice (every trip is 3 U.S. Dollars) and being 'played for a sucker' because of it by a driver who wanted more. I felt polarised. On the one hand I was afraid of that driver, and on the other I wanted to give him what I felt he had earned. It occurs to me now that I might have demonstrated racism by believing the driver might resort to violence to appease his anger. Jones (1997, p. 5) defines racism as a "belief in the superiority of one's own race over another, and the behavioural enactments that maintain those superior and inferior positions". Modern racism is based on concepts less about biology or skin colour but more "on claims that certain groups transgress fundamental social values" including self-discipline (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001, p.3). In watching the driver become increasingly agitated while his request for more money was being denied I was searching for data in my brain to resolve the situation. My own cultural experience had taught me to expect a resolution based on an acknowledged policy which would measure the time/distance of the journey and the rate per kilometre/minute of travel to allow a pre-determined, fair rate of pay for the driver. This is what I have observed in my own culture. Consequently, I was not able to accurately judge what the driver 'deserved' to be paid so I had to use my own judgement to evaluate the legitimacy of his claim. Having deemed his claim legitimate in my head, I then started sensing his anger that the Melai (a term used to describe foreigners in TL) were not treating him fairly. The use of violence in my own culture is generally not considered a solution to a claim for money but my unconscious cultural adversity towards this driver made me believe it was a distinct possibility as a solution for him. This invoked unreasonable fear in me and prompted me to intervene in an interaction that did not directly involve me – it was between my colleague and the driver.

On reflection, I had another reason for offering the extra 2 U.S. Dollars. I had observed that earning a living in Dili is tough. As I had sat on the balcony of the Dili Beach Hotel each evening overlooking the beach, I had watched as a father with two children playing nearby used a handheld axe to chop into firewood-sized pieces a large tree which had been felled on the foreshore by a group of men who looked like council workers. His progress was slow and laborious (Fig. 7). I had watched a mother with children at her side selling water bottles to passing traffic. I had observed families living in shelters built out of discarded building materials (Fig. 8).

Image copyright Jayne Pitard 2012

Figure 7: Chopping trees to sell as firewood

Image copyright Jayne Pitard 2012

Figure 8: Shelters built out of discarded building materials

I felt really uncomfortable knowing that I would later buy myself a glass of wine for 6 U.S. Dollars without impacting my ability to eat food for the rest of the week. I felt financially privileged in comparison to these people and the concept of privilege has always distressed me. The injustice of our situations aggrieved me greatly and I just didn't feel tough enough to distress a taxi driver on a hot, dirty road in a godforsaken landscape.

5.3.5 Conclusive comments on layers

In reflecting, I realise the sense of privilege I experienced could also be based in racism and prejudice. I have always grappled with how much I should give to equalise the place in the world of 'the other' in relation to my place in the world. I was lucky enough to be born in Australia, a prosperous, peaceful country. I have shelter, food and work. I have not done anything in particular to deserve this state of being over my fellow humans in impoverished or devastated countries. I do not feel more deserving than others, rather I feel undeservedly privileged. At this point in my cultural immersion I was acutely aware of privilege and I felt that privilege was slanted towards my educated, disciplined world. I wanted to know more about life in TL and more about the people whose life of hardship humbled me.

5.4   VIGNETTE 3 – LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND

5.4.1 Context

On the night of the event recorded in Vignette 2, my colleagues and I attended an alumni dinner, organised and hosted by Victoria University. At this point in our journey I was finding it difficult to be present at the dinner because of my chronic fatigue. Over a period of 18 years I had learned to manage this condition through withdrawal for rest at strategic intervals and I sensed this might be one of those occasions. I was strongly encouraged to attend the dinner and I did so reluctantly with a genuine concern for my health.

We took a taxi to a Chinese restaurant in a part of Dili I had not visited. The restaurant was on the ground floor of a building in a street lined with two storey buildings of basic construction. The restaurant was decorated as part Chinese and part Timorese, so it gave the feeling of being both familiar and fragile. Two university colleagues, with whom I had worked in Melbourne, were in Dili with a group of Bachelor of Education students from Melbourne undertaking their school internships in Dili. These two colleagues also attended the dinner. It was hot and for the first hour everyone stood around chatting and drinking.

5.4.2 Anecdote

I am finding being on my feet very difficult. Fatigue is gripping my chest and my legs feel weak. I scan the room for a kind looking face and engage a Timorese alumna in conversation about her study and what this means to her in light of the declaration of independence in Timor in 2002. As she smiles broadly throughout our conversation, I feel the need to know how she can be happy when her country has been so devastated by invading forces. I ask if she lost family members during the invasion and massacre. Her smile disappears. I feel the blood rushing to my face as I recognise my intrusion into her

private world. She describes those members of her family whose lives have been sacrificed. Almost too quickly, I express admiration for her positive attitude and, as her smile returns, she explains there is no point in looking back, that she and her people must build a new, strong nation and to do this, they need the assistance of the Indonesians. Confusion overwhelms me as I recognise my own anger towards the invaders. Gripped by fatigue, tears well in my eyes. I do not understand. I move swiftly towards the exit for a breath of fresh air.

5.4.3 Emotional response and reflexivity

At first glance, this entry in my notes may not seem to be the intense sort of experience which might provoke an epiphany in general, but it had a very striking impact on me which remains with me still. I was in awe of the forgiveness inherent in the Timorese attitude to the loss of family, culture and wealth. I was humbled by the happiness and excitement I was feeling all around me that night and I guessed that it stemmed from the release from invasion and violence the Timorese were enjoying. The violence and loss they had experienced was in the past and, although they mourned for lost loved ones, they seemed not to place any blame as they looked to the future. It wasn't until a few months later when I was reading in The Age online newspaper an article based on an interview with Ms Rosa Storelli, the displaced principal of Methodist Ladies College in Kew, Victoria, that I understood this attitude at a deeper level (Green, 2013). The author stated his admiration that Ms Storelli held no ill feeling to those who had moved against her to displace her from her position as a successful and much loved principal of a girls' school. When asked how she could manage this, Ms Storelli remarked that if she harboured ill feeling it would affect her ability to move forward in her life. She stated that she wasn't going to allow anybody else to dictate her future, so she had to shed any feeling she had about people who had influenced her past. I was deeply moved by this statement. In thinking about this, I recalled my conversation with the university alumna in the restaurant in Dili and experienced an epiphany of understanding so profound I realised that the Timorese were possibly more deeply spiritual and wiser than me. In terms of coping with cultural adversity, this was very humbling.

5.4.4 Strategies developed and concluding comments on layers

I learned from this experience that if I was to serve my students' forward development, I had to adopt their attitude. What had happened in the past must stay in the past. Our task would be to work together towards the future development of the TVET system in TL. My position as the facilitator of their learning compelled me to address current and future issues. The past was theirs to deal with.

5.5 VIGNETTE 4 – UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

5.5.1 Context

The following morning my travelling companions departed for an overnight stay in Baucau which is approximately a three hour drive east from Dili. I asked to be excused so I could spend a day

resting. On the second day of my companions' visit to Baucau, my university colleagues with their B.Ed students invited me on a visit to a local primary and secondary school. This was on the Friday, my second last day in Dili. The schools we visited were government run schools in the poorest part of Dili. This visit was a huge insight into state school education in TL in contrast to what I was seeing in TVET. Earlier in the week one of my students had driven me to his newly developed TVET training facility just outside Dili where the new facilities revealed huge optimism for the growth of the TVET system in TL. I had been informed the TL Government was funding the growth of the TVET system as a priority over primary and secondary schooling.

The primary school was situated in an abandoned Indonesian army barracks which had been partially destroyed by the Indonesians as they withdrew from TL. Enough of the walls of the long rectangular buildings remained intact to support the roofs, but little remained to shelter the students from the heat and seasonal torrential rain. Spaces where windows and doorways had been remained open to the weather. Partially destroyed walls offered limited protection. Rooms were mostly bare apart from a blackboard at the front of the classroom. Students sat in groups on the concrete floor in some classrooms or those lucky enough to have a desk shared with their fellow students.

Image copyright Jayne Pitard 2012

Figure 9: Abandoned army barracks which serve as classrooms

Image copyright Jayne Pitard 2012

Figure 10: Children copying from a blackboard leaning against an improvised wall

One room which remains very clear in my mind was divided by a wall pit marked by bullets personifying the destruction rendered by a withdrawal of troops ordered to destroy and retreat. A large blackboard leant against this wall with a group of 20 or so ten year olds copying what a teacher was diligently writing on the board. I was reminded of the lack of textbooks of any kind and marvelled at the time taken by the teacher to write so much on the board. Although the buildings of the secondary school were similarly partially destroyed, the rooms were well equipped in comparison. They had desks and chairs which students shared and their blackboards were attached to the walls. Students mostly had a seat and often shared a desk.

5.5.2 Anecdote

> The most revealing room of all is the staff room. It is a small room with six or seven office desks with computers. It has a door leading outside but appears to have no windows. Two walls are lined with high blackboards filled with chalk writing. The member of staff assigned the duty of recording staff data proudly points to individual entries under columns with headings such as date of birth, commencement date, qualifications, area of expertise, subjects taught, number of classes taught, annual leave owing. She is proud of her compliance with regulations obliging the school to record this information. She is oblivious to the laborious method of her compliance and the exposure of staff details, a practice which is regulated in Australia.

Image copyright Jayne Pitard 2012

Figure 11: The staff room from the outside

Image copyright Jayne Pitard 2012

Figure 12: Staff records on public display

Image copyright Jayne Pitard 2012

Figure 13: The inside of the staff room. Note computers not in use

> *I decide on the spot to never again complain about my working conditions. These teachers are so proud of their work, their students and their record keeping it does not occur to them to apologise for, or complain about, their surroundings. I understand they are grateful to have an institution and feel privileged to be passing on their knowledge. I have to admit, though, my admiration for their enthusiasm is tinged with compassion. I am trying hard to be understanding and wonder if I have to be totally accepting of their way of being in order to facilitate my students' learning in Melbourne.*

> *In a discussion with the principal of the secondary school he informs us that students sometimes gather in a designated classroom for their lessons but no teacher turns up. The teacher may have a family event which takes priority. The students wait in the classroom for a while and then disburse in the schoolyard waiting for their next assigned class. There is no warning that a teacher will not appear as there is often no means of communication. He explains his teachers are poorly paid but very dedicated, however it is a fact of life in TL that family events take priority.*

5.5.3 Emotional response

At the time of visiting these schools, I was engrossed in what I was experiencing, concentrating on taking it all in and recording it as best I could. My sensory stimulation was overwhelmed by the experience and allowed little time for reflection on what I was witnessing. Since this visit I have wondered about the unattended computers I saw in the staff room and why the staff data wasn't recorded on computer instead of on the blackboard for all to see. Our privacy laws would forbid this exposure of private details on a blackboard and our work plan output would suffer under such laborious recording of detail. I did not ask at the time why this information was not recorded on computer and I now realise I did not want to offend the female staff member who so proudly showed me her work in recording these details. I did not understand, and I did not ask for fear of being offensive. Perhaps these teachers did not have the computer skills to set up a spreadsheet. They did not have a printer. They did not have access to the internet. It could also have been a reluctance to give up a way of doing things that was familiar and trustworthy. I

experienced frustration at the waste of time and manpower involved. I grappled with understanding that the meaning of time in TL is starkly different from the meaning of time in Australia. I did not discuss this with my colleagues but wished I had. Their apparent acceptance of the TL way of doing things and my grappling with this acceptance prevented me from asking the questions which would give me a deeper understanding of this culture. Instead I listened to my colleagues interacting with the teachers and students at the schools and took notes.

5.5.4 Reflexivity

Witnessing the patient building of relationships by my colleagues was clearly having an impact on me and I returned to our hotel that evening reflecting deeply on my own impatience and need to get on with the job. I realised I would have to change my way of being whilst working with my group of TL students in order to cater for their culturally different way of being. I now realise of course that although I felt my knowledge of the Timorese culture was growing, I had a long way to travel (metaphorically speaking) before I would have a sufficient insight into their cultural way of being to feel confident in facilitating their learning.

5.5.5 Strategies developed

I had to differentiate between the schooling I had witnessed that day and the schooling my students would have received under either the Indonesian (1975-1999) or Portuguese (pre-1975) regimes. The current TL Government has decreed Portuguese as the language for learning in schools. Older Timorese received their schooling in either Bahasa (Indonesian) or Portuguese, depending on their age. Their schooling would have been very different under both these regimes but I had to understand their language abilities would also be different in both Bahasa and Portuguese and to be mindful that in Dili, Tetun is the language most commonly used at home. I came to understand how difficult it would be for them to study in English. I had little understanding of their schooling and how they were taught. Did they copy from the board? Student centred learning would probably be new to them and I would have to practise care and patience in introducing them to this new way of learning.

Another aspect of understanding what I experienced that day came to me much later after my students had been to Melbourne for their twelve week study and returned to TL to implement their assessment projects. As her assessment project one of the students was preparing her training centre for registration and accreditation. This required fundamental changes to the systems within the organisation such as recording staff details, student details and courses on offer. The goal was to achieve registration within the year. The strain of adopting new systems was so great that one staff member resigned under the pressure. In analysing this period of time in her report, the student noted that the loss of this experienced, trained staff member was devastating as it is very difficult to find skilled teaching staff in TL, especially in areas outside of Dili.

5.5.6 Concluding comment on layers

The experience of visiting these schools added another layer to the complexity of the culture of TL. Their way of being and working would challenge my concept of time. I would need skill and patience to accommodate the unfamiliar experience my students would have at university where they would be required to account for their presence and time. I would also need to be mindful at all times of the language barriers which may become highlighted through the use of English as our language of tuition. On our flight back to Melbourne I clarified in my mind the importance of accommodating difference in my approach to their learning.

5.6   VIGNETTE 5 – WALK AND TALK ACTIVITY

5.6.1 Context

The students arrived in Melbourne in early July 2013. On our first day together in a classroom, I was keen for them to get to know me and learn to trust both myself and each other. I told them my story, emphasising my professional career. This very act of emphasising my professional career rather than my personal life was my first indication that I was uncertain how to relate to them. I already regarded them as 'the other', wary of getting too personal, contrary to my attempt to get them to trust me. I invited them to participate in a 'get to know you' activity which I had used successfully with many past groups of students. This was an opportunity for real bonding and I stumbled through it in a state of uncertainty. I had prepared an activity in which students would walk in pairs to a private space anywhere in the university. They were instructed to tell their story, whatever they chose to tell, for 15 minutes without being interrupted by the other person. Their partner was to listen without taking notes, to not interrupt and to remember as much of the story as possible so they could retell it to the wider group. The purpose of this activity was primarily to get to know each other. It uses skills in listening without interrupting, speaking at length without prompts, and remembering salient points from a personal story. Participants could share or choose not to share aspects of their lives. There was no pressure to disclose more than they were comfortable with. On this occasion, I was not able to foresee the emotions this activity might rouse. Below is the extract from my journal.

5.6.2 Anecdote

> As the pairs drift back into the room, I ask for a volunteer to tell the first story. The youngest member of the group raises his hand. He stands and commences to tell the story told to him. He paints a picture of a person who has suffered under the harsh regime in TL prior to 1999, who has lost family members and close friends. About 4 minutes into his retelling he begins to sob. Tears stream down his face. My heart begins to race as I become alarmed that I am intruding into a space in his head and heart that I wasn't qualified to handle. I fear for him and his fellow countrymen that I am opening up wounds that are still too raw to speak about. My vision blurs as I panic and ask him to sit down. I struggle to find my voice as I apologise to the group, saying I had not realised this exercise would recall experiences too difficult to speak of and that we will cease the activity and move onto something else. They sit very still looking

towards me. I think they seem far away from me, not with me. I am not able to read their emotions from their facial expressions or body language. I suggest a twenty minute break so we can all compose ourselves.

5.6.3 Emotional Response

I had not anticipated that this activity would awaken such memories and I asked myself why I had not foreseen this. My past experience with this exercise with local students resulted in stories of personal achievement, professional challenge, experience in vocational education, and sometimes insight into personal aspiration. Why did I not give the time to think through the consequences of this activity to understand the volatility of the experiences that may surface in the conversations between the students from TL? I think I got as much fright from my lack of foresight as I did from the realisation I had to handle a situation I did not feel qualified for. I am not a psychologist or professionally qualified to deal with post-traumatic stress, which is what I instantly labelled this in my mind. I panicked. I apologised for evoking such difficult memories and told them we would cease the activity immediately. I did not discuss this with them. I did not seek feedback or comment. I simply ceased the activity and told them to take a break. Then I moved on. It distresses me even now to think about this incident as I now feel I did not respond appropriately. This was confirmed by one of the students in interview at the end of their course who told me the group was very confused as to why I stopped the activity as they had enjoyed the exchange of stories. The emotional response from the student who stood and retold his pair's story was commonplace to them. I asked myself why I did not see that also. Why did I imagine that retelling the stories in a safe environment in a faraway culture, although emotional in the recollection, might not be traumatic for them? The answer is because I have no experience to match theirs. I based my reaction on my own experience of a world where trauma is 'swept under the carpet' and largely goes unacknowledged. I am 62 years of age and growing up in the 1950s and 60s in Australia (we now know) meant keeping secrets about unrepeatable misdemeanours on the vulnerable in our society. I attended Catholic primary and secondary schools and some religious personnel I came into contact with have been tried and convicted on charges of gross indecency towards children. I have witnessed people's trauma in the media, on television and in newspapers, and personal accounts in books, blogs and articles. As an adult I acknowledge the travesty of what happened when I was a child and beyond, but faced with a situation where unspeakable violence had been imposed on the vulnerable in TL the child in me wanted to 'sweep it under the carpet' and move on, as I had been taught to do. The social conditioning of my childhood had implicitly been activated. I feel shame that I was not able to stay with the students on that day and bear to hear what they wanted to tell. I feel I failed them. I feel I am a casualty of my own society yet I have spent years studying, reading, discussing and in psychoanalysis breaking down the barriers to understanding my perception of my world and how this can differ very profoundly to others' perception of a similar world. Years of grounding collapsed in a single misunderstood interaction with an 'other' from a different (unexperienced by me) culture. And I was only on my second day with these students.

Asking myself if it is the responsibility of my university to provide some strategic training for dealing with students from a traumatised nation, I fled to my office to seek solace from my university colleagues. I felt ill equipped and unprepared to deal with traumatised students who had experience of massacre and loss of loved ones. My preparation for teaching these students had been of my own volition. I had chosen to read about the history of TL and research papers on the development of the political system and education infrastructure. I had also read some research papers on teaching international students, most of which discussed cultural tendencies to being reserved and having difficulty in contributing to class discussions. I had not read any psychological research on dealing with victims of trauma. My colleagues listened and expressed empathy, but a few minutes of empathy did little to assuage my guilt. I had no choice but to return and continue to work with my students.

5.6.4 Reflexivity

My reflexive response to this incident was to be careful and to avoid discussions of lives and experiences. This changed over time as I became more aware of the students' working conditions and experience. We discussed work contexts and strategies with enthusiasm, especially in relation to their major project assignments. However I know little of their private lives except what I gleaned from my conversations with them on our weekend outings. Despite this by the end of the twelve weeks I had become much attached to them as a group, and individuals within the group had contributed enormously to my own understanding of overcoming difference.

5.6.5 Conclusive comments on layers

Establishing knowledge of each other leading to trust in each other was foremost in my mind in introducing the walk and talk activity. It generated an explosion of panic and unpreparedness in me which initiated childlike self-searching and self-blaming. I could not have foreseen this happening; however it assisted me to understand I had not prepared myself adequately to deal with the cultural difference I was experiencing. Returning to my deep-seated philosophy of teaching, that it must be student centred, assisted me to move forward by giving control back to the students. I asked them what they wanted to learn and they had lots to say.

5.7 VIGNETTE 6 – DEVELOPING STRATEGIES

5.7.1 Context

Still burning from the terror of touching raw memories with the walk and talk activity, I organised for the students to go on a guided tour of the library. This gave me the space I desperately needed to clear the swirling guilt from my head and to contemplate how I would move out of the hole of intrusion I had dug for myself. The students sat uncomfortably at their desks either occupying themselves with hollow actions or peering at me questioningly, scanning my face for clues. They remained respectful and I apologised again, informing them I had organised for them to undertake a conducted tour of the library so they could find their way around the shelves of books and the computers available for student research. Their bodies moved slowly as they gathered their belongings, accentuating my haste in dismissing them. I needed to

concentrate on regaining control over my own anxious state. After lunch they would return to our classroom for an activity to introduce them to learning theories. We would be back on safe ground.

Explaining that evidence based research is knowledge based on actual research undertaken by a person or group of people and not just derived from someone's opinion, I introduced the students to the concept of learning theories. They interacted with my discussion asking many questions. They had not heard of any of the theorists or theories but their interest in the concept was encouraging. I regained some equilibrium.

5.7.2 Anecdote

Handing them a sheet of paper containing instructions for the activity I say:

"I am now going to give you time to go to the library in pairs to research a learning theory and prepare a presentation to the class for tomorrow. Your presentation is also to include a learning activity which demonstrates the use of the learning theory assigned to you. There are twelve of you so I have selected six learning theories. You will pair with someone who is in your apartment to make it easier for you to work together. You have a computer each and you have internet access in your apartments. You will have tonight and two hours tomorrow morning to prepare. We will commence your presentations at 11.30am tomorrow. Does anyone have any questions?"

Blank looks. Silence. I understand it to be their culture preventing them from reacting. I convince myself I am launching them straight into student centred learning from which they will ultimately benefit. Sink or swim, and they will learn to swim, over time. I dismiss them, lock up the classroom and return to my office exhausted.

The following morning at 9am I worked from our classroom so I could be of assistance to any students in need. None came until the appointed time of 11.30am. Presentations commenced. The most assured volunteered to go first. Their presentations regurgitated information from websites verbatim. They showed great interest in where theorists were born, their year of birth and their upbringing. I surmise this is because it is relatively easy information for them to relate to. Some aspects of the learning theories have been comprehended resulting in some interesting though simple learning activities (e.g. learning how to skip).

The last presentation was by two female members of the group on Carl Rogers' theory of experiential learning. Rogers distinguished cognitive learning (memorising facts) from experiential learning (doing and experiencing). Cognitive learning relates to rote learning and academic knowledge whilst experiential learning relates to applied learning where the student is involved in their own learning through experiencing the learning by doing.

As they arise from their seats the two women's eyes meet nervously. They approach the front of the room and commence their PowerPoint presentation. The first student addresses the slides in a quiet, hesitant voice struggling with pronunciation. The second

student stands aside, a look of consternation clouding her expression. We are informed about Carl Rogers' life and given a brief, sketchy account of his work. At the conclusion of the slide presentation the first student announces that her colleague will lead the learning activity. The second student steps forward as a slide appears on the screen with what looks like words of a poem or song written in Tetun, the indigenous language of TL.

She starts singing in a melodious voice and encourages her co-students to join in. It appears that the song is well known to all the students as their voices rise in unison. The student leading the song becomes animated, smiling, clapping her hands and moving her body in rhythm. She looks happy for the first time since I met her. In an explosion of understanding I realise this student is not speaking English. Memory flashes of other students speaking to her in whispers and her puzzled facial expressions during my explanations of our activities astound me. I recognise a simplicity in her activity which besieges me, making me question the task I have embraced in bringing these students to a post-graduate level of academic learning in one short year, nine months of which will be achieved through email correspondence. I clap along and put a veneer on my face of a smiling, encouraging participant, but the smile on my face masks my despair. I wonder in amazement that I have been duped into accepting this role with mere promises of support from the university. My university colleagues already have full teaching loads and I wonder at how I thought this promise of support would materialise. I have no English as a Second Language (ESL) training and I have no experience of teaching ESL students.

5.7.3 Emotional Response

I feel alone, polarised and despairing. My sense of feeling polarised stems from my own overwhelming feeling on the one hand that I might not be capable of the task before me and on the other, the compelling compassion I feel for these students upon whom there are great expectations. Not only am I being tested here, these students have been given the task by their own government of learning enough in Australia to return to TL to assist in building the infrastructure of their TVET system. I hear myself congratulating the pair on their presentation and call for a ten minute break.

When I visited TL just one month before with the university's PVC with responsibility for our TL relationship, I had asked for and been supported in achieving funding for one day per week of English language tuition with the university's English Language Institute (ELI). At the time, I had viewed this as a helpful achievement, a lifeline. However the enormity of my task had been hidden from my consciousness until that scaringly potent moment of recognition. One day per week of English language tuition over a twelve week period loomed as insufficient to deal with the lack of English language skills I had just identified.

5.7.4 Reflexivity

I understood in the midst of my despair that I had twelve students feeling their way in a foreign world, some of whom might feel more despairing than me. We were in this together. My approach to teaching is to use the Socratic Method where I pose questions rather than giving students answers. I am the facilitator of my students' learning using their intrinsic desire for discovery as our guide. The learning outcomes within the GCVET allowed an approach to learning which incorporated transformational learning, student-led learning, and discovery learning. I was their guide and I could not perform miracles, however I could enthuse them with a desire to learn which could transcend the cultural and linguistic barriers which had just overwhelmed me. When they returned after their break, I led them in a questioning exercise to identify what they felt they needed to learn. I wanted to give them control of their learning and to involve them in designing their own learning. Writing their suggestions on the whiteboard, they provided us with a comprehensive list which I came to recognise as being able to sit within the learning outcomes of the GCVET. When they had exhausted their ideas of what they felt they needed to learn, I began grouping their ideas to fit under headings identified in the learning outcomes of the GCVET. The students had become animated during this exercise. They discussed among themselves in Tetun the various aspects of their potential learning and appointed a few spokespersons to verbalise their contributions.
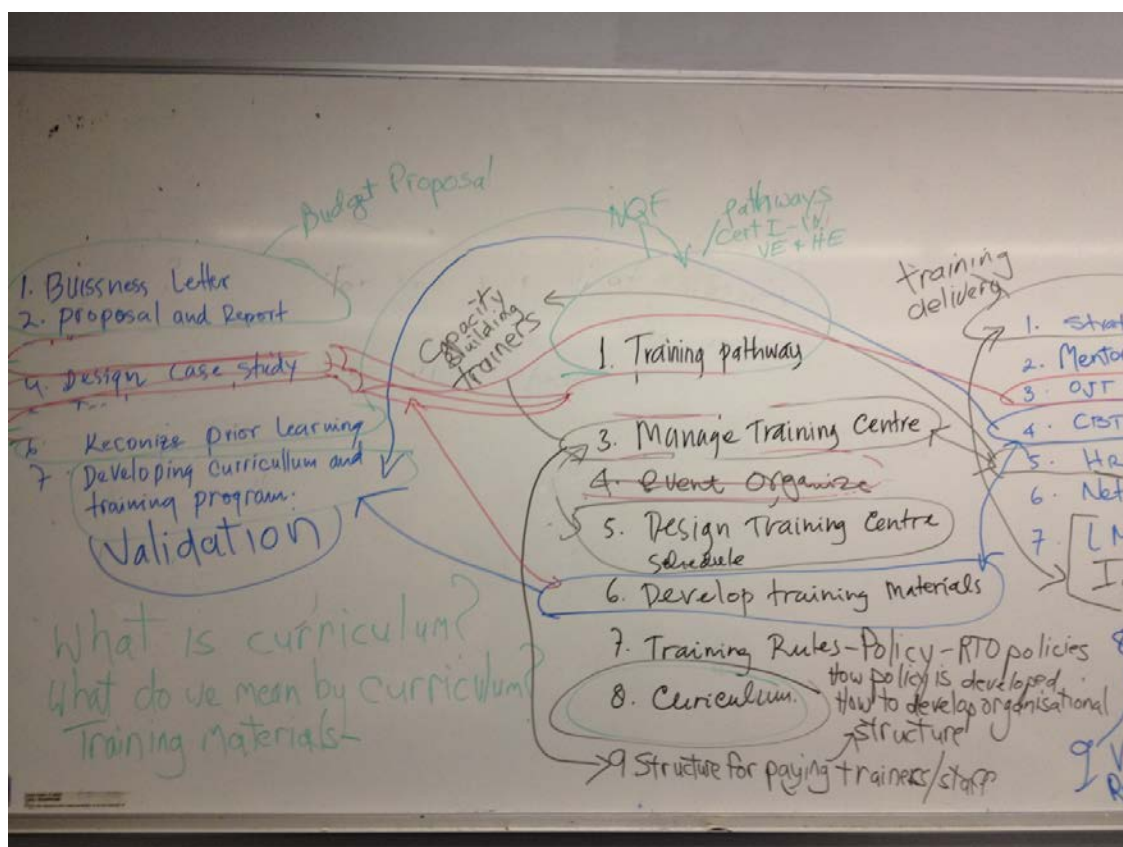
Image copyright Jayne Pitard 2012

Figure 14: What the students wanted to know aligned with the learning outcomes

The next day the students attended the ELI to commence their one day a week English tuition. I had asked the ELI to test all students against the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) so I could be equipped with the knowledge of individual student's English language ability. This would assist me in understanding individuals within the group and in selecting students to work together on projects. The lowest score in speaking, listening, reading and writing is 3 on the scale - Elementary. The highest is 6 – Advanced.

The Key for IELTS is as follows:

Advanced -	Approximately 5.5/6
Upper Intermediate -	Approximately 5/5.5
Intermediate –	Approximately 4.5/5
Pre Intermediate –	Approximately 3.5/4
Elementary –	Approximately 3

Table 7: The Key for IELTS scoring

One student gained a score of 5.5, four gained 5, five gained 4-4.5. Two students were deemed Elementary 3, the student in this vignette being one of these.

5.7.5 Strategies developed

This student at the centre of the song became one of my favourite achievers in the group although her English language skills improved only slightly during her stay in Australia. Rather than giving up on the assessment tasks assigned to her once she returned to TL, she initiated a solution through having her work translated by one of her staff members at her training institute, a German national seconded by the German Conference of Catholic Bishops to assist in TL. Before giving my approval to the student to have her work translated I sought advice on the ethics of this solution from an esteemed colleague who supervises PhD students. I insisted on declarations from both the student and the translator that the writing was the original work of the student. The student submitted five drafts of her project report seeking feedback on each draft. She submitted sixteen appendices with her final report thereby establishing the authenticity of her work.

5.7.6 Concluding comments on layers

The despair and loneliness I experienced on that third day with my students compelled me to act. Somehow I understood that without immediate action my relationship with these students could have faltered, along with my commitment to the project. In retrospect, I am mortified at my self-absorption over the task I had undertaken. I remember feeling the responsibility on my first day with the students when we organised their bank cards, mobile phones, myki cards and food shopping, and I understood how many of them had no experience outside TL. I remember having insights into the enormous shock these students were feeling at being plunged from heat into the cold weather of Melbourne in winter, at being extricated from the support and protection

of their communities in TL, at being exposed to independent learning within university life, at exposure to city life with its inherent rules and regulations unfamiliar to them, but my notes make limited references to what the students must have been experiencing. I was drowning and they must have been too, although they did not verbalise this. I felt they looked to me to rescue us all so I had no choice but to initiate strategies to redeem our situation. My extensive experience as a teacher ensured I did not struggle to recognise the strategies I needed to adopt but I did struggle to find the energy and determination to implement these strategies. It was my lack of experience with international students, fear of the unknown (exactly what my students were feeling) and the overwhelming weight of responsibility which almost destabilised the project. My advice to the novice me would be to speak extensively with a teacher within the university who had training and experience in dealing with international students and seek their mentoring throughout the implementation of the project. My immediate manager was distracted by her other managerial responsibilities and was unable to give me the time or the advice that I needed, however I know I would have benefitted from having professional support and I should have persevered in finding someone within the university who could mentor me.

5.8   VIGNETTE 7 – BRIDGING THE LANGUAGE DILEMMA

5.8.1 *Context*

Overnight I pondered the language dilemma. I had not anticipated that some students would speak very little English and that one student in particular would not understand much of what I said. Waiting for an answer from any student to a question required patience. I understood that they had to digest the question and mentally translate it into Tetun followed by searching their minds for the answer, followed by a period of translating the answer back into English before it could be verbalised. My fatigue and shock prevented me from conceiving an outright strategy for dealing with the language barrier, but a night spent understanding the students' needs and analysing the task I had set for myself opened my mind to possibility. As I entered the classroom the following Monday my mind was open to developing a strategy but I hadn't actually decided what that strategy would be. I was hoping it would somehow evolve and manifest itself to me through my teaching.

5.8.2 *Anecdote*

As I speak I see a frown appear on her forehead. I am acutely aware I am engaging only half my audience as I scan the other faces. Most are intent on deciphering my Australian accented English although some seem relaxed, understanding. When I have finished my monologue the usual contributors are involved in the ensuing discussion. I pause, thinking about how important this discussion is to the learning outcomes of the course. I feel frustrated that I'm reaching only half of them. I address the most proficient English speaker. Actually, not the most proficient English speaker - the most proficient with a demonstrated understanding of the learning taking place. I ask him to come to the front of the group and explain in his native tongue what I just said. Hesitantly he translates a difficult concept as he speaks in Tetun. Faces light up. Discussion

commences. I watch in wonder. I have just developed my most useful strategy for dealing with the language barrier – co-teaching.

Great weights lift off my shoulders as I watch the student at the front of the room speaking animatedly in Tetun. Responsibility shifts as realisation dawns on me that I have resources sitting in my classroom that I have not yet considered. I have felt so overwhelmed by the language barrier that I have questioned my own professionalism and my ability to facilitate any worthwhile learning for this group.

The students relax and the sound of chatter soon fills the room. I ask them to form into three groups of four comprising two whose English is better and two whose English is poor. Their inherent understanding of their own levels of English help them to achieve this without my intervention. I observe hesitation in two of the women and accept it as shyness. Together these groups work to ensure the learning is happening, asking questions and seeking understanding from their fellow students.

5.8.3 Emotional response

The burden of responsibility for overcoming the lack of comprehension demonstrated by some students had been weighing heavily on me. My mind had been blocked by the problem itself and I had been unable to see a solution. My practice of intuition, of listening for answers within my own consciousness, supported me on this day. I had no plan for dealing with this issue but once I understood how easy it was to introduce a practice regularly used by me with other groups of students I felt exuberant.

5.8.4 Reflexivity and Strategies Developed

I have successfully used co-teaching with previous groups when complex concepts have been difficult for some students to understand. This occurred particularly with the Career Change program where the students were tradespeople who had not previously undertaken academic study. When concepts such as double loop learning or constructive alignment had threatened to derail their confidence, I asked those in the class who understood the concepts to explain it in their own words to the whole class. I would then group the students into five or six people comprising some who understood and some who didn't. The groups would discuss the concepts and develop examples until all agreed they understood and then each group would choose one of the students who in the beginning had not understood the concept to describe it to the whole class. This method achieved many outcomes. Students gained an understanding of how difficult it can be for some students to grasp concepts and how important it is to teach to everyone's learning style. It also gave those students who led the groups an opportunity to practice teaching. In addition, I was reassured that every student had been given the best opportunity possible to be in command of their own learning. I could not see any reason why this strategy would not work for the TL students and encouraging them to speak in Tetun seemed appropriate to expedite their learning.

5.8.5 Conclusive comments on layers

This strategy underpinned their learning throughout the twelve weeks of their stay in Australia. I gained a great deal of support from those in the group whose English allowed them to translate easily and whose teaching background gave them the confidence to stand beside me and explain. The expanded confidence of the whole group in discussing their learning was encouraging and allowed me to introduce innovative ways of organising class activities. I also believe the group work in Tetun with a presentation in English assisted the students to develop their English language skills.

5.9 VIGNETTE 8 – DEALING WITH THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

5.9.1 Context

My request to secure a classroom for our three days a week of tuition was delayed until I had a firm date for the students' arrival. This shortened time span restricted the availability of an appropriate room as it was nearing the commencement of semester two and the university as a whole was requesting rooms. Added to this was my lack of awareness of the booking system at Footscray Park campus of the university. I had not previously taught at the Footscray Park campus and I was unfamiliar with the system for booking rooms. My previous experience at Newport Campus of the university had been with projects in the VET sector where I had delivered the GCVET to particular groups of students in time blocks, spending two weeks with them from 9am-5pm each day in the one classroom. Newport was a small campus where most of the staff knew each other and where we had classrooms dedicated to particular courses. The campus had experience of study groups from TL and Uzbekistan whose requirements included cultural accommodation and special needs. Block booking a classroom was foreign to the booking system in higher education at Footscray Park campus and I was told the longest period I could have a classroom booking for was three hours. Students would then have to change to another classroom for another three hour period. Each day the students would be in a different group of classrooms and I anticipated that with the upheaval of being away from their families and living in unfamiliar surroundings, changing classrooms every three hours would be detrimental to their ability to assimilate into the learning environment. I insisted on asking for a dedicated classroom for this group for the three days, Monday to Wednesday, each week of their stay. In my naivety I had not realised that to achieve this, the person allocating a permanent room for me would have to find a room which is rarely used.

5.9.2 Anecdote

> The room I have been allocated is about 36sqm with no windows or outside access.
> Entry is from an internal corridor. It is in the basement of the School of Education
> building. As I enter I see walls painted grey, carpet laid in dark grey and light grey tables
> and chairs. Rubble lies strewn on the floor and broken plaster adorns one of the walls.
> There is no natural light and no fresh air as the air conditioning hums in the background.
> I have been allocated this room Monday to Wednesday 9am-5pm and I have been
> assured the room will be clean by the time the students commence. I am grateful to

have a dedicated classroom but fearful of how we will exist in such a confined and airless space every day. I will have to plan sessions using the library and outdoor spaces.

I had learned that the Timorese drink a great deal of tea and coffee so I brought an electric jug, mugs and supplies from home and purchased tea, coffee and sugar to leave set up on a table in the corner of the room. I also purchased some fruit because I knew these students had no spare cash to buy food at the cafeteria. They would be bringing food they had cooked in their apartment to eat at lunchtime. I would show them where the microwaves were situated in the student area of the library. We arranged the tables and chairs to accommodate the students in groups of four around a group of tables in a square. This arrangement provided for group work and sharing of resources.

That Thursday of my first week with the students after three straight days of teaching, I received a phone call. On this day the students were having English tuition at the ELI at the Flinders Street campus of the university so we were not in our classroom.

> *Today I received a phone call from the room allocation person at the university with a complaint from another teacher about the messy state of the classroom we used yesterday. I left the tea and coffee making facilities on the table in the corner of the room and had not returned the tables and chairs to their rows facing the front. I apologetically explain I didn't think any other classes would be held in this room on Thursdays and Fridays and assure her I will leave the classroom in better order next week. I feel mortified that I did not understand this classroom would be used by others. I know from my years with the university that rooms need to be utilised but the position of this classroom led me to believe it would not be part of the mainstream teaching areas. I realise I've been thinking it would be dedicated to us. The phone call reminds me that we are just another group in the chain of courses on offer. We have no special consideration or rights.*

> *I feel alone and misunderstood. Following the debacle of the walk and talk activity and my realisation of the poor English skills of my students, I want someone to assure me I am doing a good job but instead I feel isolated. I am alone in my care of these students.*

We learned to control the air conditioning and often propped the door open to allow some air circulation. I called for frequent breaks and sent the students off to undertake group work in the library. I noticed they drifted back to the classroom preferring to work near each other. Our days were long in that confined space and the students became restless and often sleepy. I would command them all to stand as I guided them through some blood circulation exercises such as breathing deeply with raised arms or marching on the spot.

In the second week an email arrived in my inbox informing all the university teaching staff that a new Learning Spaces of the Future room was on trial in the library building. The university was

looking for groups to utilise the space, particularly employing innovative teaching methods. I visited the space (it could not be called a conventional classroom) and immediately felt excited.

> *Today I received a university wide email advertising Learning Spaces of the Future. I went to the library building and had a look at room P134. The space provides the type of learning environment I've created in makeshift ways for previous groups of students over the years. It's a casual learning space with equipment designed for group work and flexible, learner centred teaching.*
>
> *The space is large, light, airy and thoughtfully designed. It is oblong and along the longest side facing outside, windows let in brilliant light. Electrically controlled blinds adjust the lighting at the push of a button. In addition downlights on dimmers can be used to create lighting in particular areas. The wall with windows is furnished with bench seating all the way along. Six large screen monitors are placed strategically around the room where small clusters of students can connect a laptop to a screen to enable group work. Student tables consist of whiteboards lying flat on trestles. Students can use white board markers to write on these tables. These whiteboards can then be lifted upright and placed into a stand which converts them to a whiteboard to be viewed by the whole group. Brightly coloured striped bean bags are scattered around the room in addition to upright chairs. There is a sink, an electric jug and a drinking tap. I am in heaven.*

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Figure 15: Learning spaces of the future

> *I email a request to book this space every Tuesday from 9am-5pm. Granted. I feel cheeky so I request Wednesday as well. Granted. I think the tide is turning for us. I'm optimistic for the first time and this is filling me with confidence. It's time for me to ask for help.*

5.9.3 Emotional response

It's interesting to me now to realise I needed to feel confident in order to ask for help. I had been drowning in the overwhelming realisation of what I had taken on - responsibility for dealing with difference, the huge language barrier and the lack of independent learning skills in the students. It was like having a mental illness and being so incapacitated you don't know how to help yourself. That cloud was shifting and my knowledge and skills were rising to support me.

5.9.4 Reflexivity

A new optimism pervaded the whole group as we used the Learning Spaces of the Future room. I sensed that the students felt more important. The internal windows of the space looked out onto students utilising the library making us feel like part of a larger learning environment. They responded to the Learning Spaces of the Future room as if they were now accepted as fully fledged students of a university. I responded by reclaiming my place within the teaching fraternity of the university. I felt confident now in approaching colleagues with the expertise needed to compliment the learning I was covering with the students.

5.9.5 Strategies developed

The students required assistance in two very important areas. Firstly they needed to hear from experts other than myself. My knowledge, my style of teaching and presenting, and my capability was becoming predictable by the third week. The change of learning environment had sparked an enthusiasm which was palpable. I was sensitive to the need to maintain the momentum of this enthusiasm and I implicitly understood this required a change in style and presentation from outside. I asked colleagues with particular expertise in management, leadership, course development and teaching to present on these areas to the students at regular intervals.

Secondly the students needed to be placed with experts in their own field who could mentor them in learning techniques used in Australia. Fridays had been set aside for this mentoring and it was now time to commence the process of pairing students with suitable mentors.

5.9.6 Conclusive comments on layers

My experience with being allocated a classroom which was small, windowless and grey confirmed for me the importance of the learning environment on the ability of students to learn and a teacher to facilitate that learning. Regaining our confidence in the Learning Spaces of the Future room assisted all of us to improve our capacity for learning and to regain confidence in our own ability. Seizing the day and moving forward was essential in that third week of their learning and it would not have been possible without the change of learning environment. We became enabled.

5.10   VIGNETTE 9 – USING MIND MAPS FOR CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING – MADNESS OR SOUND METHOD?

5.10.1 Context

Critical reflection was a new concept to most of these students. They had to learn how to recall an incident and analyse their action in order to understand how they might have reacted to achieve a different or better outcome. We had worked hard on this as a group but I had been taken by surprise at the difficulty some of them had in identifying their feelings or understanding why they did what they did. I had given them the task of maintaining a reflective journal but those who submitted their journal as a final product without input from me had mostly missed the opportunity of learning by reflecting. They simply told it as it was. There was little clue in this as to how their learning was transforming their practice so I came to rely on providing opportunities for independent learning so I could observe their practice.

The Learning Spaces of the Future room provided us with tools for independent learning. Through discussion with the students I had come to understand the concept of independent learning was foreign to most of them and their adaptation was sometimes hesitant. In this learning space we had table tops approximately 1 metre x 2.5 metres finished with a whiteboard surface for students to write on with whiteboard markers. These table tops were resting on trestle table legs. It was possible for students to pick up the table tops and insert them into wooden block slots to support the boards in an upright position. This allowed all students in the group to read what other students had written on their table top and for groups to explain their conceptual understanding of a topic. I grouped the students around the tables for specific tasks, choosing the groups of four based on two things: Their English language skills or lack of English language skills and their knowledge of teaching and TVET in TL. This grouping promoted maximum learning potential for all students.

Mind maps were a new phenomenon to a majority of the students. Those who had studied previously in Australia were familiar with the use of these tools for thinking and problem solving but admitted not having practised this method of thinking since finishing their previous study. A mind map is a diagram depicting relational connections between concepts. Mind maps are usually a more personal depiction of conceptual ideas than a concept map. These diagrams may be simple or complex depending on their use and authorship. I had used the idea of a mind map on our second day together when I had asked the students to list on the board all the things they wanted to learn during their stay in Australia. I had taken the students through the process of grouping their ideas under common headings to make sense of how we could achieve all the learning in a progressive sequence. Using this method we came up with a mind map for our learning over the three months. I had then developed this mind map using the learning outcomes for the GCVET to ensure we covered the required learning for their qualification. On this particular occasion however it was the first time the students had developed their own mind maps.

I asked the students in their groups to choose a theme which they believed was central to building the TVET infrastructure in TL and to place this theme at the centre of their mind map.

They were then to brainstorm ideas, group these ideas under relevant headings and connect these relevant headings to the central theme. They were given 45 minutes to complete this activity and I encouraged them to walk between groups to observe and contribute to what other groups were doing. The aim of this activity was to develop their conceptual thinking abilities and to raise their own awareness of their ability to contribute to and build on the ideas of others.

5.10.2 Anecdote

> *As I stop at each table to listen and to guide the thinking of the individuals within each group, I am aware of an earnestness in some students to analyse the issue they have identified as being at the centre of their mind map. It seems to me that not all four students within the group understand the concepts being explored by the self-appointed leaders. Some, appearing to not want to be judged as disinterested, unwilling or unable to contribute, furrow their brows in a state of pondering the problem. I encourage discussion by asking probing questions and insist that the discussions take place in both Tetun and English so every student is engaged. I notice even so that some students struggle with the concepts. I feel frustrated that my attempts at student centred learning and self-motivated learning seem to be limited in their impact on some students. We are already three weeks into the students' learning in Australia and I am keen to see greater progress in them grasping concepts such as critical thinking. I question my strategies for enhancing student learning. Am I employing useful learning strategies? Or am I relying on comfortable, familiar strategies that have worked with my Australian students but may be counter-productive in being too advanced for students from another culture?*

> *I approach a table on my circuit and give thoughtful attention to the concepts drawn on the table top. In the centre of the diagram I see in large capital letters the word UNEMPLOYMENT circled in red. I pause.*

The person at this table with the red marker in his hand works in the Cabinet of the Secretariat of State of SEPFOPE (Secretariat of State for Vocational Training Policy and Employment) and is on his first journey out of TL. Clearly youth unemployment in TL is a serious problem and there is no doubt it is related to the appropriate development of TVET in TL.

> *"You are developing a mind map around a problem" I prompt.*

> *Contemplating eyes look back at me. No comment.*

> *"Would it be more helpful to develop your mind map around a solution?" I proffer.*

> *Contemplating eyes blink. We all look down at the table. No comment.*

> *I continue "You have unemployment at the centre of your mind map and you are developing your ideas around unemployment."*

Brows furrow as they often do.

"What is the solution to unemployment?" I ask the group. I wait. Slowly I see recognition come into the eyes of the student holding the red pen.

"Employment" he states with confidence.

"Exactly" I say. His demeanour alters. His eyes light up. He sits up straighter.

"You already know what the problems are. Now start again and develop your ideas around solutions." His eyes twinkle in response. He leans in with his free hand and rubs out the 'un' at the beginning of the word. He understands the flaw in his thinking. I smile as I turn away. My strategies are working, but slowly.

5.10.3 Emotional response

When I stopped at the table as described above and had the verbal exchange with the student leading the development of this mind map, I could physically recognise the epiphany that took place in his mind. When contemplating unemployment he had been hunched over the table and his eyes had appeared troubled. As he sat up and I observed his change in demeanour I felt exhilaration course through me. This one student with his dawning of understanding made the activity valid for me. I am not saying other students didn't benefit also which would further validate the activity, but I am certain this interaction with this student was a sign to me to persevere with the teaching strategies I had adopted. I proceeded with something akin to surging confidence.

5.10.4 Strategies developed

My doubt concerning the use of mind maps to underpin the development of critical thinking skills in these students stemmed from the nebulous nature of developing mind maps. There is skill involved in drawing out the ideas on any given topic and connecting them in relational concepts. I believed this skill required practice and much guidance and I had doubted this skill could be developed in these students in the weeks remaining. In addition a sound knowledge of the topic is required before relevant and insightful ideas can flow and be debated and this exercise had alerted me to their poor knowledge of the TVET system in its entirety. Hesitation was lurking in the back of my mind creating doubt in my ability to achieve the required learning in the allocated time. This exchange with the student buoyed my confidence and strengthened my commitment to persevere with complex thinking. I adopted a private motto: Simple language – complex thinking. The use of mind maps as a learning strategy catered for their poor proficiency in English and it had the ability to develop their ability to think critically. I carried this motto in my mind as I planned for their learning: Simple language – complex thinking.

5.10.5 Conclusive comments on layers

The learning environment in the Learning Spaces of the Future room allowed me the perceived affordances through resources and the space to separate the students into effective learning

groups. It also gave me the freedom to experiment with different learning strategies and activities. These factors can contribute to student learning provided the strategies are effective and the students have the underpinning knowledge to utilise the strategies to their full effectiveness. I was uncertain of the extent of the underpinning knowledge and during the activity described above I began to doubt the effectiveness of my teaching strategy as I was interpreting the body language of the students (brows furrowed, bodies hunched). The epiphany experienced by the student at the centre of the group working on unemployment was enough to justify to me the value of the exercise. The use of mind maps in group work would remain as a tool I would utilise. In fact, I would go on to use mind maps to address the lack of underpinning knowledge of the TVET system in TL which was becoming increasingly more obvious.

5.11   VIGNETTE 10 – DEVELOPING UNDERPINNING KNOWLEDGE WHEN IT ALL SOUNDS FOREIGN TO ME

5.11.1 Context

Underpinning knowledge of the TVET system in TL was essential for every student if they were to be effective in developing the system in TL. The gaps in their knowledge had become apparent during the mind map activity described in the previous vignette. I felt buoyed enough to instigate another mind map activity the following day designed to be a whole of group learning activity. This was an opportunity for the students to recognise how much they did or didn't know and to identify the gaps in their knowledge. They would use each other as learning resources. How does a student discover what they don't know unless someone who knows more than they do tells them about it?

At a press conference at NATO Headquarters on 6th June, 2002, Donald Rumsfeld, former United States Secretary of Defence said:

> The message is that there are no 'knowns'. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.

The students formed into groups of four styled differently from the previous day's grouping. Today's groups were made up as much as possible of a combination of two teachers and two policy makers. I had heard the students use acronyms in their discussions with both themselves and me; acronyms such as INDMO, SEPFOPE, and DEFOPE. It was equally important for me to understand this terminology so I could equate it to the various VET bodies of authority in Victoria. This would assist me to find appropriate mentors for the policy makers in the group. Knowing the purpose and role of the organisations each student worked for and how these connected within the TVET system would direct me to the appropriate mentors within equivalent organisations here. Before the students left TL to travel to Australia I had requested that each student provide me with a job description of their role in TL. This had not been possible in most cases as the job descriptions were either non-existent or they were written in Tetun and a translation was difficult to achieve.

5.11.2 Anecdote

> *My understanding of the students' roles in TL has become complicated by the difficulty in deciphering terminology used in the system in TL. One student describes her role as developing resources for business administration. I ask her if this means she develops resources for teachers of business administration. She states she goes into industry and observes workers and then writes these resources. Does she mean that she writes competencies after observing workers in the workplace? I am uncertain. Her lack of English skills prevents understanding and no-one else in the group seems to be able to assist as they are not familiar with her role.*

My understanding of their roles in Timor became a complicated process as their knowledge of VET was limited and their use of VET language in English often led to confusion in the use of terminology. My understanding of the different Government bodies was hindered by the Tetun acronyms. I had to learn to relate these government bodies to our own government authorities so I could understand the structure of the TVET system in TL. For example, INDMO is the National Labour Force Development Institute. One of the students had responsibility in INDMO for registration of training institutes. Another in SEPFOPE (Secretariat of State for Vocational Training Policy and Employment) had responsibility for accreditation of training qualifications. Both of these students could be mentored by relevant staff in either the Australian Skills Qualification Authority or the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) in Melbourne, which have national and Victorian responsibility respectively for registration of training institutes and accreditation of VET training qualifications. The 2010 Standards for the Registration and Accreditation of Vocational Training Providers in TL state:

> *Accreditation means that a registered provider is able to offer nationally recognised qualifications. The qualifications are recognised by INDMO, are part of the TLNQF (Timor Leste National Qualifications Framework) and are based upon INDMO approved competency standards. Accreditation will only be available to registered VTPs (VET Training Providers). Accreditation will be granted subject to the providers' ability to meet the accreditation standard for the national qualification/s it intends to deliver. Accreditation means that the registered VTP has the right to offer national qualifications and the responsibility to maintain and improve the quality of its provision.*

Another student was a director of a training centre who was working towards gaining registration of her training centre and accreditation to deliver qualifications from the TLNQF. Whilst in Melbourne, she had the privilege of working with the two people in TL (one in INDMO and one in SEPFOPE) who would be assessing her application. All of this worked very well for the students but initially they had little understanding of the interconnectedness or interdependence within the group. I wanted to expose this interconnectedness.

> *I assign the groups the task of creating mind maps or organisational charts of the TVET system in TL as they understand it. They approach this task with enthusiasm and the room is soon buzzing with discussion in Tetun. I invite all students to visit the different*

tables to view the mind maps of each group and to ask questions. Discussion is constant and vigorous. Our debrief is led by Jose, the director of a private training centre. His explanation is in both English and Tetun. He asks everybody what they have gained from this exercise.

One student says she finally understands how all the different authorities interconnect with each other. She had not previously understood how the authority she reported to related to the TVET system. Now it is clear. Another student reports a similar epiphany of understanding. Yet another has not previously understood the significance of course accreditation and training centre registration. Now she has questions to ask. Most agree their knowledge of the TVET system in TL has gaps they had not previously identified. Two or three students' knowledge appears more advanced. They suggest I speak to an Australian man who assisted in developing the TL TVET infrastructure. I immediately sit at my computer and Google his name. He has worked in many developing countries in the Pacific region.

I phone this man the following day. He agrees to spend a day with the students explaining the infrastructure and how training competencies are developed in TL. Relief and excitement heave inside me. I recognise I need this learning as much as the students.

5.11.3 Emotional Response

I felt alone in my teaching of these students. I knew I could call on some of my generous university colleagues to give workshops in various areas of VET learning such as leadership and management, building and hospitality, but I was acutely aware that the sequenced progression and depth of the students' learning rested with me. My growing awareness of what they didn't know pressured me to go back to the beginning, back to the development of the TVET system to explain it from the bottom up. Time was my enemy as each day expired. I was teaching right up to 5pm despite protests of fatigue from some students. At times my sense of urgency overwhelmed me as I acknowledged the scope of underpinning knowledge that needed to be covered.

5.11.4 Reflexivity

Prior to the students arriving in Australia I had researched the TVET system in TL. Only starting in 2009, by 2012 it was a relatively new system and still a work in progress. I needed clarification on many aspects such as how competencies were developed and written, what standards applied to delivery of qualifications, what stage of development the TLNQF had reached, how the TLNQF equated to the AQF and much more. I felt ill-equipped to be providing information on the TVET system in TL to these students. I knew I had to defer to the personal knowledge of this Australian contact who had contributed to the development of the TLNQF. I would sit with the students and learn alongside them.

5.11.5 Strategies developed

I began thinking about what other Australian professionals might be available to address these students on different aspects of the development of TVET in TL. The Hon. Steve Bracks, former Premier of Victoria, had been working in TL and it was at his instigation that the funds for the program I was delivering had been made available by the Victorian Government. I phoned his office and his assistant who had worked with him in TL agreed to come and speak with the students about the work of the Victorian Government in helping to build the TVET system in TL. I was now looking beyond the general concept of Vocational Education to discover how those in TL developed the TVET system from the ground up. I asked them to share with us their knowledge so we had a basis on which to build our own knowledge.

5.11.6 Conclusive comments on layers

My understanding of how much these students understood about a system which regulates TVET had been exposed as unreliable. I had to listen during our sessions to determine what they knew and what they didn't know. I felt threatened when I discovered the depth of their lack of knowledge and understanding of the TVET system in TL because I had based my program on an assumption of a level of underpinning knowledge which I could build on. I felt despondent when I realised I had not undertaken enough research to match their needs. A suggestion from one of the students empowered me to seek knowledge from those who had contributed to the development of the TVET system in TL. I aligned myself with the students in learning about the system from its inception. Our knowledge was jointly enhanced.

5.12   VIGNETTE 11 – THE ROLE OF INTUITION IN THE ART OF CHOOSING A MENTOR

5.12.1 Context

Insisting students have a mentor has often been a feature in my previous deliveries of the GCVET to teaching staff at the university. In my preparation for these students from TL I had determined this would be a crucial factor of success for the students, particularly because of their language and conceptual difficulties. I felt their language and conceptual difficulties would be assisted by their physical presence in work environments which aligned with their own work in TL. My attempts to match the students with a mentor were initially based on the work role of each student in TL, such as my decision to approach the VRQA to mentor the students from INDMO and SEPFOPE. It wasn't always so straightforward to source an appropriate mentor for individual students however. Often the role as described by the student from TL could not be equated directly to a role in VET in Melbourne. This is because it is inappropriate to presume for instance that business initiatives in TL equate to business initiatives in Melbourne. For example, one of the students was part of a team that appropriated grants from the Employment and Vocational Training Fund (FEFOP) to finance activities that contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the unemployed and vulnerable in TL. Whilst at first glance this may equate to a grant for the establishment of a small business such as through the Australian Government's Business Aid Centre, the activity that contributes to the improvement of the living conditions of the people of TL may be growing a crop in the highlands of TL or producing

commercial batches of tofu in a thatched roof hut. For this student, monitoring the effectiveness of a grant from the government may involve a four hour drive through treacherous mountain country. The student stated that often she and her colleagues would arrive at a pre-organised meeting with the grant recipients to find them gone to a family or village event which had been given priority. As there are no telephones or internet connections in the mountains, there is no way of communicating this information to FEFOP at short notice. Thus the treacherous and tiring journey has been made with no satisfactory outcome and has to be rescheduled, requiring another day of travel at a later time. How can one equate this experience to monitoring and evaluation of recipients of grants in Melbourne where information and forms are readily available on the internet, and completed and submitted via the internet?

It was clear to me that I had to be intuitive in choosing mentors for these students. Those with poor English skills and those facing spiritual crises imposed by the way of life and standard of living they were experiencing in Melbourne needed extra care. Coming to terms with leaving Timor and experiencing cultural difference created spiritual and emotional dilemmas that increasingly became evident to me through student behaviours. A young mother who had left her children in the care of her husband and extended family became increasingly silent. Some students struggled to be present intellectually within the group in class time, falling asleep in the middle of the day. Rest periods became important for all. Those with strong Catholic affiliations sought comfort in local Catholic rituals and communities and some sought relief in local expat Timorese communities. I remained sensitive to the fact that communication with loved ones in Timor was difficult due to the lack of internet access. I started thinking outside the box. Instead of matching all students with mentors based on job descriptions, I identified students with more complex needs and matched them with mentors within the university that I had worked with over the years who had demonstrated to me superior skills in reflexivity and profound thinking.

5.12.2 Anecdote

> He is gentle, thin, young and sensitive. He is skilled in English. He has studied theology and is the principal of a Catholic training college in Dili. This is his first visit to Australia. At the beginning he smiles a lot. As time progresses his smiles are more fleeting. He is troubled.

> I match him with an associate director at the university who has been the director of a secondary training college although his current position within the university is not related to this. This mentor has studied philosophy, is gentle, wise and sensitive and has worked with disconnected young people. He takes the student into his home for dinner, discusses many aspects of life with him. The smile returns. Though no problems have been solved and no workplace visited, a soul has been listened to, nurtured, guided. This is a flourishing match.

5.12.2 Emotional response

My intuitive self dominated my relationships with some of the students. My professional judgement of the needs of individual students assisted me to discern whether their prevailing

needs were academic, physical or emotional. I was their carer as well as their teacher. Some were capable of providing for their own needs but a couple were lost in a sea of confusion, shyness, or both. I was at my most nurturing when confronted with these few students but I didn't have the strength or time to provide for their needs myself. Nor would it have been appropriate. They needed a third party to whom they could speak in confidence about their daily lives as students. Finding suitable mentors for these students filled me with as much joy as if I had been able to nurture them myself.

5.12.3 Reflexivity and strategies developed

The young man discussed in my vignette eventually recognised he was experiencing a crisis of identity. His experience in Australia and the learning he was undertaking became transformational for him in an extremely painful way. He needed someone to assist him through the difficult thought processes confronting him and to discuss with him the different way of life he was experiencing in his developing awareness of his freedom to be himself. It is interesting to note that on his return to TL he made a decision to change his life.

This change in his life resulted in him forfeiting his position as director of a training college and initially being without a career path to follow. The major assessment for the GCVET was to return to TL and implement a project which had been discussed with and approved by me. This student's project had been focused on his former position as director of a training college. After consultation with me by email we changed his project to research transformational learning and how this had influenced his decision making processes. He presented his research to the group to fulfil his assessment task, demonstrating an insightful understanding of the role of the critical self-reflection needed to gain perspective on the beliefs, values and assumptions that humans acquire through their life experiences. After his return to TL a colleague and fellow student recognised his predicament and offered him a teaching position at his training college. He progressed.

5.12.4 Conclusive comments on layers

In my mind my obligation to these students encompassed more than the teaching of a post-graduate qualification. For some I was their link between the solid ground of their previous life experience and the new emotions experienced through the critical reflection I was endeavouring to foster in them. They had each other as sounding boards but they needed direction and feedback. I believe every student experienced transformational learning, some to a greater extent than others. My evidence for this is found in the work they produced for assessment.

5.13   VIGNETTE 12 – A CRISIS OF SELF MANAGEMENT

5.13.1 Context

It was the first week of September and the winter had been bitterly cold. The students had walked to the university every morning along the river. This was a twenty minute walk and they often carried their computers, lunch and any books they had borrowed from the library. They never complained but they often commented on the cold and how different it was to Timor.

When I asked about their weekends some of them often told me it was too cold to go out. Over those winter weeks I came to understand how long the weekends often seemed to them so I organised some Sunday outings either into the city or to see Australian animals on the outskirts of Melbourne. My week then consisted of three days teaching, one day of preparation, two days off work and one day taking the students on an outing. Five days involved with university activities and two days to run my home and spend time with my family. As a chronic fatigue syndrome sufferer this schedule was more than I was used to.

5.13.2 Anecdote

The alarm reverberates in my head as I realise it's Monday morning. My body feels like lead. I close my eyes knowing I risk falling back into deep unconscious sleep. A voice inside my head reminds me of my obligation to my students. I slip my legs out from beneath the covers and will my body to elevate. As I stand, the room fades temporarily and I struggle to bring it back into focus. Slowly I shower, dress and head for my car. No time for breakfast. I'll drink my green tea when I reach the university.

I follow my teaching plan for the day. I am with the students from 9.30am until 5pm. I answer their questions during the morning break and offer advice whilst sipping a cup of tea. I listen to their questions and offer advice during the first half of our lunch break. I excuse myself and eat something with my colleagues. Twenty minutes later I commence our afternoon session. I forget to drink water. I have a cup of jasmine tea during our afternoon break while chatting to some students who wish to discuss their assignments. At 5 pm I conclude our formal class but stay to listen to students who wish to ask me questions. I offer them advice. Catching a glimpse of the clock on the wall outside our room I quickly gather up my computer and coat and rush out the door to my car. I am due on the tennis court at 7pm. I play mixed doubles competition tennis on a Monday night. I arrive at the courts, rush into the change rooms and emerge with racquet in hand ready for a warm-up before commencement of play.

We are in the second set and I am serving. I look down the court at the person I am serving to. I stall. As the server I am required to maintain the score. I ask my partner if he knows the score. He tells me. I serve and return the ball automatically. I hit the ball long. I can't remember which side I have just served from so I ask my partner again to tell me the score. I move to the appropriate serving position and serve the ball. The return comes back to me very fast as I swipe at the ball and miss it. I can't remember which side I have just served from and again ask my partner the score. My opponents get the giggles. I am disoriented. I look at my opponents giggling at my lack of concentration and they start to fade. The court comes up to meet me and I realise I am falling. I call for help. My partner reaches my side as I slip down and he softens my fall. Our opponents hurry to where I am lying. One is an ICU nurse and she grills me with questions. Her decision is definite. She is calling an ambulance. I recover enough to speak and state that there is no need to call an ambulance. I will be fine. I stand and the world fades again. I lie down on the court for reassurance. I feel frightened. I do not

understand what is happening to me. After some discussion I agree to be driven to the emergency department of the nearest hospital and ask that my daughter be telephoned so she can meet us there. She works at the hospital during the day. Later I ask her to telephone my manager the following morning so she can inform the students I will not be in class for the rest of the week.

My blood pressure is 60 over 40. I am hooked up to monitoring equipment and spend the first night in ICU. Not because I am in a critical condition but because it is the only free bed in the hospital and my daughter receives benefit as an employee. They wish to give good care to their staff and families. The following day I am transferred to the cardiac ward where I spend three days hooked up to monitoring equipment. I have an ECG, an MRI, a brain scan and blood tests. By Thursday the specialists are satisfied my heart is not the problem and I am released. I feel exhausted and beyond thinking clearly. I spend the weekend in bed.

My manager phones me. She tells me she cancelled the classes for the Tuesday and Wednesday. The students were told to use the time to work on their assignments. I assure my manager I will be ready to resume the following Monday.

A former colleague who is a close friend comes to visit me. She has witnessed my worst times with chronic fatigue and is concerned for me. She offers to prepare a day of teaching if I tell her what I want her to cover. She used to be my Head of Department so I know her strength is leadership. She offers to collect me on Monday morning to drive me to uni and to run the sessions for me while I co-ordinate from the sidelines. She will not be remunerated; she will not be covered by insurance. I gratefully accept her offer.

5.13.1 Emotional Response

This incident scared me. My blood pressure was so low it needed constant monitoring and because my symptoms resembled those of a potential stroke my heart also required 24 hour monitoring. Inadvertently spending the night in ICU added to my fright even though I knew I didn't qualify as an ICU patient. Seeing those around me fighting for their lives throughout the night humbled me beyond even the events on the tennis court. My daughter was adamant that I needed to do less not more for my students and pointed out to me that my health should come first. I felt this was a warning to me to slow down and listen to my body, and as my daughter insisted, to put my health first.

5.13.2 Reflexivity and Strategies Developed

This incident also scared the students. Hospitals in TL are reserved for the very ill and consequently I was deemed as being in that category. The students were distressed for me and inherently understood my attention to their needs had been too much for me physically. With just three weeks left we developed a new pattern of working together. They became more independent as they turned to each other to discuss their learning before bringing to me the results of their group work. They led class discussions instead of waiting for me to stand and

lead from the front of the room. Their growing confidence was evident as they demonstrated to me the signs of self-determining their learning. I encouraged them in their endeavours and congratulated them on their transition to student centred learning. They walked tall.

5.13.3 Concluding remarks

My physical difficulties alerted me to the absolute commitment I had made to these students. I had been unwilling to compromise their wellbeing so instead chose to compromise my health. A familiar lesson for me, as in the past I had been unwilling to acknowledge the strain I placed on myself in order to achieve an outcome that had become intensely important to me. Inadvertently, this incident of physical weakness in me propelled the students to take the final step in embracing self-determination.

5.14   VIGNETTE 13 – HAVE WE LEARNT SOMETHING OR NOTHING?

5.14.1 Context

It was our last day together in Melbourne. We were spending the morning in a large meeting room on the fourth floor of the library building with expansive 360 degree views over Melbourne. Later that day we would attend a farewell afternoon tea and tomorrow the students would return to TL.

I felt it was important for the students to acknowledge their achievement over the previous twelve weeks. We discussed how they felt about what they had learnt and their comments were positive but I didn't recognise a perception of the depth of their learning. Their comments were unconvincing. On instinct I suggested we undertake an exercise where each student would be invited to walk to the whiteboard at the front of the room and write down something they had learned which was of value to them.

5.14.2 Anecdote

No-one moves. They stare ahead at the whiteboard, frightened to look at me.

I have time. I can wait. I have learnt patience over the last twelve weeks.

There is a stir. Silently a student walks to the board, picks up the whiteboard marker and writes. Another student moves towards the board and adds another piece of knowledge. I have provided three whiteboard markers and soon all three markers are constantly in action. I notice that something written by one student will inspire another student to add to it. As the board fills up smiles are beginning to appear on faces. The second whiteboard begins to fill. Fifteen minutes later the two whiteboards have no white space left on them. They are covered in writing.

I ask "Do you acknowledge how much you now know?"

The silence in the room is broken by a student clapping. Others join in and soon there is a chorus of clapping as they celebrate their achievement. Smiles are broad. They are happy.

5.14.3 Emotional response

It was extremely important for me that these students acknowledge the learning they had achieved. Their sacrifice in leaving their homes and families, coming to a different culture, enduring the bitter cold winter of Melbourne and studying as hard as they did deserved to be rewarded. That reward needed to come from within themselves, not from me. Acknowledging this achievement at a deeper level as they did on that morning would mean they would carry this achievement with them forever. This was my reward for all my hard work.

5.14.4 Reflexivity

There was another reason why it was important for me to be reassured that their learning was broad and deep and acknowledged by them. My past teaching had involved teaching staff within the university whose progress I could track from time to time as I came across them using university networking. The progress of my external students in the Career Change Program where I taught industry experts to teach youth at risk in secondary schools was known to me through undertaking a longitudinal study over ten years of ten groups of teachers. My ego was fed by teachers who were assigned positions of responsibility or who demonstrated signposts of transformational learning through developing outstanding learning programs for their students who might otherwise have dropped out of school. Their achievements signalled my ability to assist people to change their lives. Their ordinariness and struggles inspired reflexivity and consequent improvements in my teaching practice. I did not know how my future relations with my TL students would unfold. I grasped this opportunity to reassure myself that something had come of my efforts.

5.14.5 Strategies developed

My deep sense of commitment to these students has given me hope that I can overcome my consciousness of difference when interacting with another culture. At times throughout the journey I had doubted my capacity to overcome my fear of difference, of being different, and to teach a group who is different. The 'other' has now become familiar. There is no turning back.

5.14.6 Conclusive comments on layers

To send these students home happy and confident in their belief in themselves has been one of my aims from the beginning of the course. This aim is part of my pedagogical philosophy. The learning outcomes for the GCVET have been essential for the attainment of the qualification, however transformational learning is the outcome most desired by me as I enter the lives of a group of students. I have not always achieved this outcome as some of the feedback from previous groups of students indicates. However this transformational learning is not always evident at the time a student completes a qualification. I have had past students contact me a year or two after the completion of a qualification to inform me of their continuing growth as a

result of the transformational learning they have experienced during the delivery of the GCVET. This is my hope for the Timorese students.

5.15   VIGNETTE 14 – THEIR ACHIEVEMENT OR MINE?

5.15.1 Context

In June 2013 a colleague accompanied me to TL to assist with assessment of the students' projects. My plan was to spend two days listening to student presentations, one day with the students for data collection for my PhD and two days visiting students in their workplaces to gain extra evidence of their work practices if I felt I had not yet received enough evidence to declare them competent at AQF Level 8. We arrived in Dili on a Sunday evening. Returning to TL I was drenched with anticipation. I would be re-united with my students – these people who had invaded my life and developed in me a new sense of what it means to be different. Some of them would be travelling great distances to attend the presentations of their achievements over the last twelve months. I knew from their project reports some would be proud and well prepared, others scrambling to put together their PowerPoint presentations in a professional manner and perhaps regretting leaving this until the last minute. All had promised to attend for the three planned days of presentations and interviews for my research but I wondered what last minute compelling work requirements or family events might prevent them from coming and I felt nervous about this. I believed the success of the scholarship program hinged on all students achieving the qualification. Some students had stayed in constant contact with me; some had remained mostly silent until I reminded them I was arriving for their presentations in eight weeks. Even then I didn't receive immediate communicative responses from them. Instead there was more silence until completed reports were emailed three, two or even one week before I was due to arrive.

On the Monday morning we were collected from our hotel by a student and driven to DIT to commence student presentations. We passed students in neat uniform, raggedly walking along the side of the roads in groups, carrying books, headed towards the local school. The houses we passed were simple huts with dirt-covered grounds manicured with palm tree fronds. This contrasted significantly with the whitewashed orderly buildings emerging through the trees as we rounded the corner and pulled into the long driveway of DIT. Wide steps led up to the front entrance and as we parked the car and approached the entrance, familiar smiling faces appeared to greet us. My response was immediate and enthusiastic. I greeted them like long lost children and the shyness in their responses reminded me once again of the cultural differences which I must respect. As I threw my arms around the first neck and hugged tightly to let them know I had missed them and they had been in my thoughts, I became aware of the curious glances from unknown faces in surrounding groups of students and pulled myself out of the embrace as quickly as I had thrown myself into it. The few of my students who were there on the steps to greet me were smiling broadly and seemed to recognise a trait in me that they found enjoyable. I did not detect any offence but rather an indulgent amusement at my exuberance. We were led to a room where the presentations would take place. We were being honoured with the use of the Boardroom, furnished with a large solid wood oval table in old

European style (Portuguese) and twenty large comfortable office chairs on wheels. The walls of the room were white and the four double windows were closed and covered in sky blue curtains which remained permanently drawn against the oppressive heat. At the head of the table pushed against the wall stood two flags hanging in folds from their brass poles. One had the colours of Timor Leste, black, yellow and red, the colours of indigenous peoples, and the other a DIT flag in blue and white. A screen had been pulled down from the ceiling at the front of the room and a projector attached to a laptop computer was connected to a power source on the wall behind. At the back of the room on a podium stood a statue of the Virgin Mary with artificial flowers in a vase. Two wall-mounted cooling units ineffectually buzzed in the background.

5.15.2 Anecdote

> *Her hands fumble as she inserts the usb into the laptop connected to the overhead projector. Her PowerPoint presentation glows from the white screen in the overly hot, darkened boardroom. Her lowered voice and hesitant English ensures she has the absolute attention of her audience. Her presentation is detailed and complex. Her explanation gains confidence with each passing slide. Her project is well executed and evaluated. Her audience applauds with enthusiasm. As we take a break before the next presentation commences, several of the older students approach me to declare their delight at the student's presentation. They do not believe a year ago she would have been capable of such a complex report so confidently delivered.*

> *"She was so shy when she began this course".*

> *"She has never before produced a report like this".*

> *They marvel at her progress. I recognise in them not only their pride for her but pride for themselves. This achievement makes them feel proud of their collective accomplishment. I am bursting with joy. I want them to tell me more about how they feel. This is my reward for my work with them. They drift away to take a break. They have said enough. My reward must come from within myself. I did the best I could whilst feeling my way blindly through the cultural landscape of their minds, their lack of underpinning knowledge, their difficulty in studying in English and their emotional trauma in leaving behind family and friends. I feel vindicated in my belief that these students could reach AQF Level 8 within the twelve month period of the GCVET. I check my pride. It is not my achievement. It is theirs.*

5.15.3 Emotional response and reflexivity

There were many presentations worthy of comment, but the fact that other students wanted me to understand their amazement that this student had developed the ability and the confidence to make her presentation is significant. It was a dawning for all of us of the consequence of the learning that had been achieved over the previous twelve months. I now realise I wasn't alone in believing we had achieved much. Rather than individual students taking pride in their own

achievements, what happened in this incident was a collective understanding of what it meant for them as a group.

5.15.4 Strategies developed

Their recognition of each other's ability to work hard and produce results gave them confidence in each other. They were colleagues working together to strengthen and develop a system they were all members of. They were recognising the development of individuals within the system; cogs within the wheel. Perhaps collectively they could build a better TVET system in TL. They experienced a sense of coming together, of understanding.

Peter Senge, founding Chair of the Society for Organisational Learning, says people in learning organisations are:

> concerned with a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future. (Senge, 1990, p. 69)

5.15.5 Conclusive comments on layers

I felt this was what I was witnessing this day in these students - a realisation that they were not acting alone, that their colleagues had worked on substantial projects for their assessment and they had achieved a high standard in their work. I felt it was a dawning realisation and I was joyous. What had sometimes seemed to me impossible had been achieved.

5.16   VIGNETTE 15 – OUR FINAL NIGHT IN TL. I MAY NEVER SEE THESE STUDENTS AGAIN. I MAY NEVER VISIT TL AGAIN.

5.16.1 Context

Several of the students organised a dinner to farewell us and invited all the students to attend. It had been a busy week for the students with three days spent involved in their assessment and focus groups and interviews for my research. One of the organisers of the dinner had said he would collect us from the Hotel Dili at 6.30pm.

5.16.2 Anecdote

> We hug the edge of the road as we travel through the rain along the coast to a restaurant east of central Dili. A single windscreen wiper works laboriously through the driving rain providing little relief from the distorted, watery view of the road. The sun sets abruptly, as it does in the tropics, and light is dim. I find it hard to define any beam from the headlights of our car. He drives slowly, cautiously, occasionally avoiding potholes with a swift pull on the steering wheel. Oncoming cars are throwing up arcs of water onto our already watery windscreen. I speculate how far we still have to travel, fearing each swerve of a pothole and each curve of the road. The car moves slowly but still I feel vulnerable to injury. My thoughts wander to the relative protection of the street

lighting and bitumen roads in Australia and again I am reminded of how much I take for granted.

We reach our destination and rush in, out of the rain. We enter a large open space with plastic chairs and tables. The roof is supported by wooden pillars. There are no walls. I recognise it as the restaurant I visited with my colleagues on my first trip to TL. I know we are facing a beach. I listen for the gentle lap of the waves and I'm not disappointed. Three or four roaming cats and dogs lurk in the background. I recognise a group of three students and a stranger waiting for us at a table. We are introduced to a smiling nun who has accompanied my student from Baucau. She greets us easily in English. Food is brought to our table like magic. Plates of calamari, lettuce, a large whole cooked fish, rice, chicken and chips, a dark green cooked leafy vegetable. Lots of garlic. Lots of chilli. There is enough food for at least fifteen people. Four students, one friend from Baucau and my colleague and I eat our way through as much as we can. We share a bottle of wine. There is urgent chatter in Tetun at different periods throughout the evening. I wonder why some students have not joined us. Perhaps this farewell is not important to them. Those who are here at the restaurant with us have done us great honour. We are presented with gifts. I hug them. They are shy. Goodbye.

Our journey back to the hotel is easier. The rain has stopped. We hug the ragged edge of the bitumen. There are no street lights. We thank the student who has given us this gift tonight. Tomorrow at 5.30am we will awaken and at 6am be driven to the airport by a hotel staff member. Our plane departs at 8am for Darwin.

The next morning a hotel driver transports us to the airport.

As we enter the airport building a beaming face appears before us. It is a student who had been with us at dinner. I had not expected any of the students at the airport for such an early take off. As we move through customs two of the female students who had not attended the dinner appear at our side, big smiles on their faces. They apologise for not being at the dinner. The rain had prevented them attending. They both present us with gifts. One of them introduces her boyfriend. I glimpse more about this student during this introduction than I have during our twelve month relationship. She is petite and quiet. I feel happy for her. The boyfriend is studying medicine in South America. Somehow her connection with this aspiring young man explains her determination in her own work.

We board the plane and settle ourselves. I have time to think. Heavy rain prevented these students attending the dinner. The public transport I have witnessed in Dili consists of minibuses stopping anywhere along the main road as they are hailed. People hang out windows and doors of these vehicles and grab onto railings on the roof when the bus is overflowing. The service is not consistent or reliable. To own a car is a luxury. The student who drove us to and from the dinner must have been very proud to collect us in his car. I recall the one windscreen wiper that did not clear the windscreen

of water and the weak beam of the headlight. I also recall being told that although there are now many cars in Dili, obtaining spare parts is almost impossible. To have been driven in a privately owned car is a privilege. Life in Dili is what it is! I leave it behind as the plane lifts off the tarmac. As we climb, the coastline of TL is revealed in all its splendour of tropical vegetation and beautiful clear waters. The trauma and triumph within is hidden from view but is carried with me as I return to my disparate world of trauma and triumph. I am changed by my experience – more tolerant, wiser about what constitutes triumph, admiring. My work is not over – this story needs to be told.

5.16.3 Emotional response

Leaving was hard, but it was not. Each world is germane, both theirs and mine. There is a place for both. Moving between the two used to cause me discomfort. Now I am full of wonder. This work with the students from TL I rate amongst my greatest teaching accomplishments. I will enter student results and write my report. I have done my job. I am tired. My family needs me to return with commitment to them.

5.16.4 Reflexivity and strategies developed

During my time teaching the Timorese students I have had to question my underlying assumptions on numerous occasions as outlined in these vignettes. When I instigated the walk and talk activity I was terrified that I had opened memories I had no right to rouse. I did not know how to handle what I perceived as intensity of experience so terrifying it could hardly bear to be recalled. I had to question why I believed the Timorese should sweep these memories 'under the carpet' as I had been encouraged to do as a child. In later vignettes I demonstrate how I learnt of a world where dealing with these memories can lead to a forgiveness that allows us to leave the past behind, to move forward without hate or fear. This experience has been transformational for me.

5.16.5 Conclusive comments on layered account

Learning to understand the 'other' requires patience and endurance, understanding and questioning, experimenting and innovation. The Timorese demonstrated these qualities beautifully. I thank them for what they have taught me.

The following chapter will expand the reader's understanding of the development of the teacher/student relationship by revealing how the students developed their own strategies for dealing with the difference they experienced.

CHAPTER 6:   THE STUDENTS - ANALYSIS THROUGH CASE STUDY

6.1   INTRODUCTION

This second part of my research centres on the students. The use of case study method provided a research strategy to discover how the students experienced the cultural difference in learning in Australia and how they adapted to the teacher-student relationship. I also seek to answer what particular strategies they used to cope with the difference and how and why these strategies were successful for them. Many of the students found it difficult to express their thoughts in English which is most often the third or fourth language for them, with Tetun, Portuguese and Bahasa taking precedence, therefore using other sources of evidence such as observation and student artefacts became crucial to the authenticity of this research. A particular strength of the use of case study method in this research is the capacity to use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). This has the advantage of supporting the language limitations of the TL students in responding to the research questions, by allowing me to incorporate the wider context of their experience in the classroom through the use of multiple sources of evidence. According to Willis (2007, p. 104) hermeneutics has expanded in recent years "to include understanding human action in context". Although there are many variations of hermeneutics, Smith (as cited in Willis, 2007, p. 104) concludes that they all share two common characteristics:

- An emphasis on the importance of *language* in understanding. Language makes possible what we can say, and it limits what we can say.

- An emphasis on the context, particularly the historical context, as a frame for understanding. You cannot understand human behaviour and ideas in isolation; they must be understood in context.

My choice of case study method for part 2 of my research was not meant to generalise about students' adaptation but rather to gain a consensus from the group about what were the major issues and then to study individuals to add depth to our understanding of the coping strategies adopted by individuals. To achieve this, once the students had completed their assessment in the last week of their course in TL and understood their result had been recorded, they agreed to a focus group session including all students to identify major issues. Following this, I asked for four volunteers to be interviewed individually. The detail of my methodology is discussed at length in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyse the data provided during the focus group and the four individual interviews to enable sense-making of the students' experience in adapting to learning in a culture different from their own. These data have been categorised under themes and represent the views of the students. I follow this

presentation of the data with my discussion of these themes and what I observed using all sources of data. Yin (2010, p. 11) discusses that "an emic perspective attempts to capture participants' indigenous meanings of real-world events" and deliberate interpretation by the researcher of what has been observed is described where "an etic perspective represents the same real-world events, but from an outsider's perspective". I signpost in my data analysis whether an emic or an etic perspective is in use. Typically case study research uses various sources of data such as interviews, observation, documents and artefacts (Yin, 2009). My sources of data include a focus group, semi-structured interviews, direct observation, formal assessment work including their final project report, and visual expressions of their learning, such as photos, drawings, mind maps and student journal writing.

Both the focus group and the semi-structured interviews were designed to align with the research questions and to prompt the students to answer the following questions:

What practices did students develop to cater for the cultural differences they experienced in the program?

How was the relationship with students perceived to be fostered by the Australian teacher educator?

How did the students adapt to learning in a new environment? What coping strategies did they develop to enhance their learning potential?

How did the students adapt to communication techniques used? How did the students cope with the interaction required for group and independent learning?

What plans did the students develop for implementation on return to TL of what they learned in the program?

6.2   THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Before conducting the focus group and interviews to gain a student (emic) perspective on their experience, I informed the students that their qualification had been completed and their results had been recorded. This was an important distinction as I did not want to confuse my role as teacher and researcher. I provided them with an information sheet (Appendix 1) detailing my research and their involvement in it, my contact details and information regarding withdrawing from the research at any time. They were also provided with a consent form to be completed and signed by them. Ethical issues require consideration throughout the entire research process and not just at the time of providing information and completing forms. A procedure for withdrawing from the research process was detailed on the information sheet and students were encouraged to speak to me at any time if they had any concerns about their involvement or confidentiality. They were familiar with my email address and a bond of trust had developed during my period of teaching the students. I felt confident they would express any concerns to me directly however I also encouraged them to speak with a fellow student who could report back to me if any student felt vulnerable. I trusted that the students would be respectful towards

me and each other. I encouraged them to speak honestly and told them that the qualification they were undertaking was now finished and I wanted to learn from their experience to assist further groups of students. Their comfort in participating in this research was paramount in my explanation to them. Smith (1995) discusses not only considering how the participants might feel during the focus group but also how they might feel in the aftermath of disclosures by other students. What participants might find distressing is likely to be a personal matter and because of the nature of the open group discussion, anticipating distressful experiences could be challenging. Accounts of experiences during the period of teaching might also upset the researcher as she might hear things about the way she handled the group which may cause regret. I sought the students' permission to have my colleague present during the focus group and explained her role in recording the proceedings of the focus group. I also offered her presence as a means of either the students or myself needing to discuss, in private, issues as they arose which might affect our ability to continue in a professional manner with the collection of data.

Debriefing at the end of the focus group and interviews was given due consideration, and time was given to allow participants to consider the impact the discussion in the focus group and interviews had on their observations of their time in Australia. Students were invited to discuss any issues which might have arisen from these discussions with me or my colleague. The duration of the focus group was just under three hours with one fifteen minute break in the middle, although some students remained at the end to continue discussion with me. The duration of each interview was generally around one hour.

6.2.1 Focus group

Conducting cross-cultural focus groups for the purpose of research has been the chosen method of many studies (Adderley-Kelly & Greene, 2005; Colucci, 2008; Knodel, 1995; Strickland, 1999; Yelland & Gifford, 1995). Most discuss the need to address the specific cultural norms of participants when conducting the focus groups so these differences can be catered for throughout the process. For example, Strickland (1999) exposes the custom for the elders in Pacific Northwest Indians to be the last to speak at a gathering which affected the essential interactivity of the discussion. Adderley-Kelly and Greene (2005) list amongst their lessons learned that a trusting relationship is vital to the success of focus group research and yet it can take time to build trusting relationships across cultures because of the differences in communication. All authors speak of the need for respect for cultural differences. Several factors in relation to the TL students need to be considered in my data analysis. Firstly, a trusting relationship had been developed over the year I had been teaching these students. Secondly, their exposure to cultural customs in Australia during their three month stay in Melbourne had influenced their approach to communication with me as their teacher. I no longer felt like the authority figure (teacher) they had been taught not to question when they were in school in TL, but rather I sensed a willingness to engage in more open discussion. They had adopted the concept of critical thinking during their study in Melbourne and had been exposed to the notion of evidence based practice through research. There was little to fear for them as

they were well known to each other, and had developed trusting relationships with both myself and my colleague as well as each other. In fact their exuberance in discussing the particular challenges identified during the focus group often brought laughter and smiles to their faces.

It was important to me as the researcher to gain honest and spontaneous data in the focus group before exploring how particular difficulties were perceived. To achieve this I sought a free flow of responses in conversation style initially, before involving the students in activities designed to induce deeper reflection. My colleague took notes during the free flow of conversation and, with student permission, I recorded the discussion on a digital recorder. Together with the students we grouped their responses under themes which we wrote on individual pieces of butcher's paper and stuck on the walls around the room for all to observe. The students were then given stick-it notes to record individual observations and invited to stick them on the butcher's paper under the appropriate themes. To avoid disadvantaging students whose English skills were poor, I encouraged discussion in Tetun and allowed small groups to chat together before providing their feedback. Stick-it notes were a deliberate choice for individual feedback in point form, so that students did not feel overwhelmed by having to write in English. Discussion on the points made on the stick-it notes was also encouraged in Tetun with those more proficient translating into English. This allowance provided richer data more representative of the group as a whole, not just from those with more proficient English.

6.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

During the focus group all students had been encouraged to reveal their personal experiences of their study in a developed country setting, however the further purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to provide an opportunity for individual students to reveal more openly their coping strategies and how they perceived the development of their relationship with the teacher. Whilst each of the four volunteer students appeared eager to share their experiences, their limited English language skills restricted their ability to find the vocabulary to describe their experiences. Patton (2002) describes how cross-cultural interviews can add layers of difficulty to the already complex interactions of a semi-structured interview as both the interviewer and the interviewees grapple with limited vocabulary to describe complex responses, misinterpretations of responses and further questioning from the interviewer to clarify responses that the interviewee has no language to describe. However the interviews between myself and these four students had the advantage of being grounded in the long-term relationship we had developed with each other and the level of trust which had developed between student and teacher. They were also assured that anything they revealed in the interviews would not affect the gaining of their qualification as results had already been recorded. The students were familiar with the interview questions as they had been given these questions at the commencement of the focus group before they accepted the invitation to be interviewed. They understood the nature of the research and its purpose which had been explained to them at the time they received their information sheet before the focus group.

6.2.3 Data analysis techniques

In analysing the data from both the focus group and the interviews, I looked for themes in student experiences which indicated a co-relation between their individual experiences and their group experience. This homogeneous sample of international students with similar cultural backgrounds had varying levels of experience in international travel and diversity in study experiences. Nonetheless the majority of their experiences followed similar themes as they dealt with cultural change, extreme weather conditions, new learning conditions and techniques, and language difficulties of varying degrees. In fact, as noted in 6.2.1 above, in the focus group the students themselves assisted in identifying themes before they went through the exercise of using stick-it-notes to explore more fully their experiences. In re-assembling the data under the themes identified by the students, I present the data as expressed by the students in the focus group and in the interviews and then progress to a discussion and analysis referring to the literature to assist in the sense-making of the data. I present the researcher comments and direct quotations from student data in italics.

6.3   DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.3.1 Focus group student responses

The focus group was held in the afternoon at the conclusion of one and a half days of individual project presentations. A one hour lunch break was requested as there was no cafeteria on site at the Dili Institute of Technology and most students had not brought their own lunch. My colleague and I were invited to accompany the group to the newly built Dili Plaza to eat in the food court. We travelled in the work car of one of the principals of a training college. We returned to the DIT boardroom where the presentations had taken place that morning and were greeted with the now familiar whirring of the under-efficient air conditioner, battling against a temperature in the high 30s. The TL Flag and the large blue statue of Our Lady resumed their ascendancy of our group discussion. After our initial information session and signing of consent forms, the group were eager to commence.

The research questions I designed for this case study are presented more formally in this thesis than I delivered them during the focus group and interviews. My experience with these students had taught me that I would often have to repeat questions in several different formats before I was rewarded with expressions of understanding and contributions to the conversation. The purpose of re-interpreting the questions was to ensure the students understood the intent behind the questions, so as to extract a true understanding of their experience. I was mindful of this in the focus group and interviews and offer below the wording I chose to use in order to create greater understanding of the questions.

Research question: What practices did students develop to cater for the cultural differences they experienced in the program?

Actual questions asked: What cultural differences can you identify between Australia and Timor Leste? How did you cater for these cultural differences? What practices did you

develop to help you overcome these cultural differences?

Weather

The overwhelming initial response to the question of cultural difference was the cold weather they experienced having arrived in Australia in the middle of winter. One student spoke of being unable to get out of bed in the mornings because she was afraid of how the coldness would make her feel.

> *Cold weather affected learning. Cannot wake up and have shower. We are tired, cannot concentrate.*

They described an involuntary loss of energy at having to wear heavy jackets to keep themselves warm. With little experience of cold weather, the clothing they brought with them from TL was inadequate at keeping them warm. In preparation for their arrival I had sourced donated second-hand coats for the students, which they accepted. They reported finding these 'jackets' heavy and complained that the heaviness and the confinement of wearing such a garment restricted their movement.

> *Force ourselves to wear to keep warm. Heavy, difficult to move, lose our energy.*

They felt their energy was depleted through the burden of wearing such heavy clothing and they had difficulty concentrating on their study. When asked how they adjusted to the cold weather, they spoke of the need to keep moving to stay warm and talking together to take their minds off the coldness. As they discussed the need to keep moving in order to stay warm, I wondered out loud if the constant movement to stay warm added to their sense of a loss of energy. On prompting, most agreed it was a good thing that they had a half hour walk to the university each morning as it helped to warm them up. They did not report feeling cold inside the classroom.

Carrying money – paying for self

When confronted with a situation where they were invited on an outing and then told they should buy their own lunch, the students reported enormous embarrassment because they had not thought it necessary to carry money with them. The students explained that in TL if you invite someone anywhere, including a restaurant, it is accepted that you will feed/pay for your guest. They became confused when they found this is not the tradition in Australia. They told me the story of how a university colleague with responsibility for assisting TL students invited them on a day excursion to a community environment park in a northern suburb of Melbourne. At lunchtime they were given the opportunity to go into the cafeteria to buy themselves some lunch. They felt very confused because their host did not accompany them into the cafeteria. They were embarrassed when asked to pay for their food choices because none of them had brought any money with them. They explained that in TL nobody would take a wallet with them if they had been invited to spend a day in the company of somebody. Everything would automatically be provided for them. They stressed that in TL the rules are clear. In Australia

they are not. Sometimes people invite you out and provide everything for you and other times they invite you out and expect you to pay for yourself. The students were uncertain when to take a wallet and when not to. It is not customary in TL to carry money as a general rule, as it is here in Australia.

They also spoke of adapting to the use of an ATM (Automatic Teller Machine). They explained that in TL they have to withdraw "*lots of money*" due to the inconvenience or lack of banking facilities. They expressed delight at the convenience of ATMs which allowed them to withdraw small amounts of money as often as necessary. They regarded this as comforting as they had feared having to carry large amounts of cash, expressing real anxiety about being separated from the security of their community in TL. They indicated their sense of vulnerability through the fear that cash could be taken from them in Melbourne when they were living in an apartment community where they knew no-one. In TL the students would not experience this feeling of vulnerability because the large communities in which they live and where they know all families create trust amongst individuals.

Individual time and safety

In communities in TL people rarely spend time alone. The students had life experience of "*big groups and large numbers of people*" but in Australia "*people want to have their own time*". They felt "*a bit conscious*" about whether there would be someone to help them, especially when they were in their apartments or out on their own, isolated from the university 'community'. Slowly they came to understand that in Australia if they needed help the police or ambulance services would come if they called them. The way in which the students related this in the focus group indicated they had engaged in conversations between themselves about how they would cope with any emergency that might arise when I was not with them. The idea of 'services' that could be called to assist them was something they came to understand gradually. They expressed that their anxiety about this issue was high at the beginning of their sojourn and they clustered as a community to deal with their group anxiety and together came to the realisation that Australian communities rely on public services for their personal and community safety and security.

Having individual time was a new experience for these students. They expressed their initial surprise that people in Australia value having time on their own and they had not anticipated this before leaving TL. Their experience in TL was of living with extended family and being members of a close community. Nor had they anticipated that over time members of their group would make their own decisions about doing different activities away from the group. They arrived in Australia with an expectation that the group would do everything together. Over time however, the freedom to choose how to spend their time resulted in individuals or small groups choosing to go off on their own to do different activities in the city. Another surprising aspect for them was choosing who they wanted to spend their time with. One stick-it note described this as "*relate to those I want to*". They explained that in Timor people continue to work on weekends but in Australia, the weekend is considered a time of relaxation and rest, to spend with family and

friends. They cited as an example that not every student chose to attend the local Catholic Church on a Sunday so a small group would attend Church while another small group might choose to go into the centre of the city. As a result of realising their freedom to make their own decisions rather than having to abide by the group decision, some of the group learned to value this freedom while others remained confused by it and expressed feelings of isolation and loneliness. These feelings arose mainly on weekends when some remained in their apartments while other members of the group were out exploring the city.

Time Management

Punctuality as expected in Australia was a new concept for most students. They reported that in TL arriving on time is not an expectation and some students found it difficult to understand the concept of punctuality. The perception of time in different cultures is discussed in my analysis.

Multiculturalism

Respect for Australia's multicultural society and its tolerance of difference had a positive impact on the students. They described a lack of tolerance in TL of minority groups, such as small religious groups. In contrast they found people in Australia are more tolerant and seem "*not to care about religion or which religion you are*". They stated there seemed to be less conflict in Australia within and between different groups, explaining that in TL there is tension between political groups and even between martial arts groups. They observed that "*in Australia everything is in order and we are not frightened".*

Learning new systems

Using a ticketed public transport system in Australia proved a challenge for these students. The university provided them with a myki card, which required swiping each time they entered a public transport vehicle (tram or bus) or at the entrance to a train station. In Timor there is no ticketed public transport system; rather there are minibuses which can be hailed anywhere along a main road. When these minibuses are full, people grab onto anything on the exterior and hang on as best they can. The payment method remains unclear. Most of the students were inexperienced at using an electronic swipe system or using specified stops for pick-up and let-down. Some avoided using public transport unless with other members of the group. Sometimes they were forced to travel on their own such as when they had to meet with their mentor at a different university campus or at an off-site office. They reported the need to listen to as much advice as possible so they did not make mistakes and get themselves into trouble. The students could laugh when recalling the student who received a fine for not swiping his ticket before riding on the train, but at the time they were terrified of authority.

Shopping for food in Australia was a skill the students had to learn. Large fresh food markets presented a challenge as there was so much choice with different stall holders offering similar produce. Supermarket shopping also presented a challenge because the students had difficulty understanding the packaging information.

Research question: How was the relationship with students perceived to be fostered by the Australian teacher educator?

Actual questions asked: Did you notice your teacher developing relationships with you as your study progressed? What did your teacher do to assist in developing these relationships?

When the topic of discussion changed to the student/teacher relationship they agreed that my initial effort to call each student by name worked in my favour in developing a relationship with them. One student interestingly wrote in the third person:

> *Our teacher memorised our names very quickly. This showed us she*
> *was trying to develop a relationship with us.*

Another female student spoke in Tetun at the focus group while another student translated. She said that when I greeted the group at the airport on their arrival she was afraid of me because of my direct speech. Her translator described this as:

> *Give clear talk and get to point quickly.*

She said that over time she grew to "*love*" me because I cared about the students' welfare. I took them out on weekends and taught them how the systems in Australia work. I was always asking them if they are okay. She did say that I was always asking questions and expecting them to answer. Another student described my attitude as professional and inclusive of everyone. He noted that I did things for the students which were not part of my job, like taking them to a football game:

> *The way you welcomed us at airport was professional. Engaging in classroom*
> *was inclusive of everyone. Not just professional but caring. Bring tea to football*
> *for us. Not part of job.*

Another student reported that on seeing me for the first time at the airport when the students arrived, she felt reassured that her shyness would be assisted by my friendliness towards her:

> *When we met in airport and saw you from afar I felt I'm happy because I know you are*
> *friendly. You are very friendly. This was my first time and I felt shy but I thought I could*
> *have a good relationship with you.*

Friendliness in their teacher was a common theme in these discussions in the focus group. It is not for me to anticipate what unfriendliness might have meant to them, and they were not able to contemplate this in their group discussion. However they repeatedly suggested that my open, friendly approach to them assisted their integration into the Australian culture.

Efforts on my part not to judge students on their use of English were commented on by the students. They felt comfortable in expressing themselves to me even though they understood

they were not using correct English because they felt I was listening to *what* they were saying rather than *how* they were saying it. This encouraged them to communicate in English and learn by doing so.

> *Even though we have difficulties and problems Jayne is try to understand us. So wherever the difficulties we always have a great amazing staff that we can learn together.*

Research question: How did the students adapt to learning in a new environment? What coping strategies did they develop to enhance their learning potential?

Actual questions asked: What difficulties can you identify in your learning in a different cultural environment? How did you deal with these difficulties? What strategies did you develop to enhance your learning potential?

The students identified language as a tangible barrier for their learning in a different cultural environment.

> *Lack of English made me feel worried. We had access to internet, library but our culture passes on knowledge verbally. We are not used to learning by ourselves. When you ask us to go and research we read but after five minutes we find it not interesting.*

This is not an unusual barrier to learning but coming from a culture where animism is inherent and mythology is passed down through storytelling, language can be a complex barrier to learning. It becomes not just about the difficulty in understanding the language but also about how the stories are preserved and handed down from generation to generation. A culture where English is the first language relies heavily on the printed word to hand down its knowledge, customs and history. In Australia, the culture that commenced with British settlement records traditions and research mainly in print and learning to read is the basis of its education system. In contrast, high context cultures rely on storytelling by elders to preserve folklore and customs, meaning the knowledge is mostly related orally through communities.

Other students agreed they did not learn by reading. They learnt more through listening to the teacher – a practice they are used to in their native learning environment in TL. As one student admitted:

> *I recall things you (the teacher) said but I find it hard to recall what I read.*

Initially the students could not understand the Australian accent and found it very different from the accent of those who had taught them English in TL. They explained that it was mostly people working for the UN from whom they had learned their English and it was predominantly an American accent they had listened to. They also commented on the difference in language and choice of expression. It took them some time before they could understand my accent and expression without asking each other for clarity

The students expressed concern that one day per week spent at the English Language Institute within the university was inadequate for the development of their skills in reading academic papers and undertaking academic writing. They felt that they had just reached the point when they were engaged with the learning when they had to return home. A group spokesman expressed it well:

> *We had just learnt how to use resources and to write about what we were learning when it was time for us to leave.*

Others also commented:

> *The time was too short for us to adapt to methods of learning.*

> *We would have preferred to complete the whole qualification in Australia because it was really difficult to study while we were working.*

The reference to resources in the first comment above is significant because the resources offered through the university library, including unlimited use of 24 hour internet, were not available to the students in TL. Students reported that the internet in TL is unreliable as it drops in and out unpredictably. It is also very slow to download documents and resources causing frustration for the students.

Researcher comments:

> *My attempts to maintain communication with the students when I was seeking submissions of work for assessment were often frustrated by a lack of internet access by the student. I would email a student with words of support around the time a submission of work was due and receive an encouraging response from them, then I would not hear from them again for three months. Unpredictably an apology would be sent stating the student had not had access to the internet for three months.*

Research question: How did the students adapt to communication techniques used? How did the students cope with the interaction required for group and independent learning?

Actual questions asked: What communication techniques did your teacher use (i) to communicate with you (ii) to encourage you to communicate with each other? How did these communication techniques used to communicate with you differ to communication techniques used in Timor? How did these communication techniques used to encourage you to communicate with each other differ from those used in Timor? How effective was the communication with your teacher and with each other? Did you feel isolated at any time? How did you cope with this feeling of isolation? Did this feeling of isolation hinder your progress with your study?

Communicating in a low context culture proved difficult for these students from a high context culture. They noticed that "*everybody has his own business*" and "*even neighbour in apartment does not greet*". This was in contrast to their lives in TL where they knew and communicated with the wider community surrounding them where they appreciated a sense of belonging and felt valued. The lack of greeting in Australia made them unsure about being open and friendly. They were uncertain who to greet and who not to greet. They reported seeking advice from TL friends in Melbourne to assist them in understanding the social norms. It was agreed that learning to speak English quickly would have assisted them to develop relationships with Australians. Most students agreed that the relief of being able to speak Tetun inside their apartments did not assist them to learn English quickly. They expressed regret that they were not housed in Australian homes with a family where they might have been forced to speak English. They believe this would have assisted them to improve their English language skills.

The students expressed gratitude that I did not judge their communication with me based on language skills. They appreciated being given the opportunity to converse amongst themselves in Tetun and then appoint a spokesperson to translate the essence of their discussion into English. As one student stated:

> *Very keen that we met you and you try with different and strategic steps. Different backgrounds here in Timor and different abilities with language – you really accommodate with everybody and then excuse our talk. I am frustrated with me expressing my language and giving trust to you.*

What plans did the students develop for implementation on return to TL of what they learned in the program?

This last question was addressed to the students at the end of a long day in the heat inside an enclosed room. They were ready to depart for their homes and indicated their frustration at this question by talking amongst themselves as they gathered their belongings. They indicated their implemented projects as presented for assessment was their actualisation of the learning they undertook in Australia. It was difficult to gain any further elucidation as their attention had already drifted to their journey home.

6.3.2 Four case studies

Student 1 – Nicolau – Director of Training Centre, Degrees in Philosophy and Theology

When asked about communication in Melbourne, Nicolau expressed that it had been extremely difficult for him. He used the term '*cultural shock*' to describe the intensity of the difficulty he had in understanding how to express himself, especially in the classroom with me. He explained to me that sometimes he noticed I did not like some of his expressions. He was not able to give me an example.

Researcher comment:

> *Choice of vocabulary and sentence structure can often be mistaken for bluntness and as I challenged Nicolau on some of his statements I often detected bewilderment in him.*

In contrast, he admitted he felt trusted when I asked him to translate for his peers the concepts I was discussing and to explain to his classmates in his own words the concept as he understood it. I would request this of him after he had explained to me what he understood from our discussion and I was satisfied he had understood the concept. He explained that he felt like a bridge between his classmates and the learning.

Assessment for the GCVET was initially a challenge for Nicolau as he had not previously encountered work based assessment. In high school and technical school in TL, and higher education in the Philippines, learning and assessment had always taken the form of teacher centred learning (didactic) followed by examination. In Melbourne, Nicolau was initially confused by my announcement there would be no exams and that assessment would be undertaken both during their three months in Melbourne through group based work and on their return to TL where they would be required to complete an individual work based project. Student centred learning passes the responsibility for the learning back to the student to establish a habit of critical analysis. Transformational learning requires a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built. As Nicolau transitioned his learning throughout his time in Melbourne his perception of learning and assessment broadened and in his interview he was able to describe it thus:

> *I was used to teacher instructing us for all the work and then we would sit an examination and write down everything the teacher had told us. Here it is a light switch – turn it on and you pass.*

This does not indicate assessment was easy for him. In fact he admitted he found assessment difficult but he was happy when I created group learning within the classroom where students could have critical discussions in Tetun. This was helpful because they could learn from each other. He found the group discussions after each student presentation particularly helpful. He acknowledged that discovering "*75% of learning cannot come from books*" was a revelation and this made him appreciate my style of teaching using questioning and discussion.

Nicolau's eyes glowed and his demeanour calmed when he discussed his own transformational learning. He commenced by commenting on my acknowledgement that as adult learners, the Timorese students brought much with them into the classroom:

> *As soon as we entered classroom you recognised we had knowledge we brought with us. We were considered as adult learners.*

With authority, he then voiced how he had come to understand that learning theories apply to everyday life. Initially he did not understand why he had to research learning theories and do a presentation as he did not understand the objective. However when it came to assessment and

he was asked to include underpinning learning of theories, he connected in his head how these theories apply to life:

> *Learning process occurs outside classroom as well as in. I learnt this from you. You acknowledged the reality outside the classroom, to see the manifestation of the theories in the life of the Australian people. Good learning to see Australian customs.*

His last comment about seeing Australian customs was enlightening as it indicates he was able to separate himself from the situation of Australian people and 'see' the difference between his customs and ours.

With his eyes still glowing he continued to describe his own learning journey and how it had transformed his life. When I interviewed Nicolau a year after he had first come to Australia he had left the priesthood and was currently without work, however his decision remained firm in his mind:

> *Learning should be internalised. We should apply it to our own life. I had doubt about being a priest before I left TL. The learning in Melbourne helped me to determine my life and my future. I will never doubt my own judgement again.*

Nicolau's advice for teachers of future groups of TL students coming to Australia included the teachers learning how difficult it is to be with people of a different culture. In addition he recommended lessons on Australian culture be given to TL students prior to coming to Australia, and the first 2-3 weeks of their sojourn be spent familiarising them with Australian culture and how to communicate. He added that this would be most helpful.

Student 2 – Jose – Project Manager in a Training Centre, Degree in Engineering

Jose is an energetic person who contributed profoundly to the learning of the whole group. He grasped the concept of critical thinking skills before any of the other students and assisted in guiding them through writing their daily journal using critical thinking skills to record their individual journey of learning. He confided to me that when he returned to TL after spending three months in Melbourne studying he made an appointment with the Minister of Education in TL to raise the possibility of including critical thinking skills in the school curriculum. Such was his enthusiasm after adopting this new approach to learning.

As a teacher Jose has developed a method of understanding what his students already know and what they need to learn. The Minister for Finance in TL asked Jose to teach the management staff in his department how to perform to their KPIs (Key Performance Indicators). Jose was asked to interpret the KPIs and explain them to the staff. He started by asking the staff about their roles within the department but soon discovered they had no clear guidance about how to perform their work. He described this plainly, referring to his own learning in the GCVET about how to write a job description:

> *People working in Ministries come to work 8-5 but don't know what they are meant to do. There is no job description.*

Using mind maps Jose asked the management staff to map how their current communication is happening. They found it difficult to do this. Jose spoke to the senior management to determine what their staff were required to know and built this into the learning. In his enthusiasm words tumbled out of Jose's mouth and excitement at his own accomplishments was palpable.

When asked about adapting to Australian culture two things came to mind. He repeated the loss of energy he felt in having to wear a big jacket to keep warm. He discussed the restriction in his movement and how heavy it felt on his body. The other thing on his mind was having to pay for himself when invited out. He added that it is very confusing when you are invited to someone's home for a barbecue but you are still expected to bring something to contribute.

Researcher comments:

> *As with other case study interviews, Jose was interviewed for an hour however there is little data that relates to the questions. I believe this is due to two things. Firstly his accent is very strong and it was difficult for me to understand everything he was saying so I would often ask him to repeat, or I would ask a similar question hoping I could understand him better the second time. Secondly, he was very enthusiastic about his work since returning to TL and preferred to focus on that rather than examining his experience when he was studying in Australia. Consequently when I asked about the student/teacher relationship he related this question to his relationship with his students.*

Student 3 – Paulo – Director of Training Centre, Diploma in Training and Assessment

Paulo's accent was easier for me to understand. He told me he had visited Melbourne once before, but he readily admitted his lack of vocabulary restricted his ability to express himself. However my discussion with him was energetic and his candour in answering some questions indicated his wish to co-operate fully in this research. In answer to the question about noticing cultural differences he directed his answer straight to differences in learning techniques. His cultural difficulty he said was with systems, "*very dynamic, self oriented systems*". He explained that "*system means a way of educating*". In TL and Indonesia all resources come from the teacher:

> *Australia is the opposite. Activities come from yourself, your learning comes from research on your own.*

He described frustration at realising the opportunity he was being offered to learn a different 'system', a different way of approaching learning, and wondered why he had not realised at an earlier stage in his career that there was a different way of doing the learning:

> *Made me a bit frustrated – why I face this good opportunity and this has not happened to me before. I have always questioned the style of learning in TL and Indonesia and when I get to Australia I am frustrated it has taken so long to experience this.*

In explaining the difficulty he had in being able to express himself adequately in English he said he understood presentations and discussion but having to write in English was very difficult. He felt frustrated that he did not have the vocabulary to assist him. He found the structure of the grammar and the meaning of words inhibited his ability to be able to write in English. He added that he wondered how others in the group with less English skills than him would be able to complete the GCVET. He said he knew his English had improved during his study in Melbourne when on his return to TL his friends commented on his improved English vocabulary but added that this improvement was not sustainable without practice back in TL. After returning to TL he felt he was more aware of questioning the benefits of what was being done in his training institute. He was mindful of "*learning theories and how these could be applied to the training plans*" prepared by teachers. He strived for better planning which integrated the various demands from government and industry, and he was more intent on developing managerial skills in his staff. He explained that although these things had been part of his agenda for his training institute in the past, he had not fully understood why. He now has confidence in what he is doing.

When asked about what could have been done to assist the group in coming to Australia, he commented:

> *Groups of volunteer students from (the university) have preparation before travelling to Dili, so how can the university expect that students from TL can come to Australia without any preparation?*

He explained that the group were very keen for me to know how difficult their cultural shock felt as they believed I was accommodating and would assist them. Sometimes they discussed issues amongst themselves before approaching me so they could have a unified approach and all their individual concerns would be covered. As an example, Paulo cited the activity of researching learning theories and preparing a presentation for the group which the students undertook in their first two days of the course. Paulo explained that he came to understand that learning theories relate to teaching but this confused the students who had believed they had come to Australia to learn how to teach in their particular field, such as hospitality or building. They did not understand the concept of underpinning theory and were not familiar with evidence based research. He also explained the students initially did not understand the distinction between facilitator of learning and teacher. Coming from a teacher centred education system in TL the concept of creating their own knowing through critical thinking skills and research (rather than learning knowledge from the teacher) was difficult to understand. He was emphatic however that he is very grateful to have had the opportunity to develop independent critical thinking and the skills "*to find things out for myself*". He has experienced haunting regret that he

did not use his time in Melbourne to maximise this opportunity. He clarified this saying he found there were too many choices in Melbourne, which he described as:

> *Like driving through too many intersections with too many choices. I wanted to know many things about Melbourne and about the courses (at the university) to take back to Timor (for his training institute). Also I was asked to be a member and support Wildlife Australia and I gave money to stop gas (exploration) in Kimberley. I have received an email from them saying 'We won. No gas in Kimberley'. This is good.*

I was conducting this interview with Paulo at a resort which had recently been developed along the coast from Dili. The resort is one of many planned for Dili to attract tourists. We were up high above the coastline, seated on lounges outside, sipping fruit juice with a wonderful view over the ocean. The environment was conducive to an intimate conversation and the pull of my questioning prompted Paulo to recall some lingering feelings of regret over not maximising the opportunity he had in Australia. He recalled that sometimes I would give the students tasks to prepare overnight or over several days and they would arrive at class without sufficient preparation. He admitted this troubled him because he felt he had not fulfilled his duty as a student. He added:

> *This made me feel bad. Duty in class is taught to us as children. I feel sick when I not do my duty as student. I feel no good inside.*

This issue had not been uncovered in the focus group with other students and had not occurred in any other interview. It was an admission which seemed to come from a place in Paulo that might have been responding to presuppositions and assumptions learnt in his previous schooling experiences. His shame overwhelmed him:

> *It took me months to recover from that feeling. I had to keep myself busy when I came back to stop myself feeling bad.*

Paulo recalled that assessment for the GCVET required each student to propose two work based projects they could undertake when they returned to TL. Students were asked to discuss these proposals with me so together we could decide on the most suitable for assessment purposes. Paulo did not present two proposals to me before he returned to TL. Despite repeated requests from me after his return to TL, in his frustration at himself, he chose his own topic. This exacerbated his feeling of having let himself down:

> *I think this is my personality, to feel bad if I am not a good student. I was like this as a child.*

Paulo took me to his training institute where students attend from both Dili and the regions of TL. One of his UN funded programs brings young people down from mountain villages to learn agricultural techniques. I was impressed with the organisation of the students and the planning undertaken by the teaching staff.

Student 4 – Antonio – Training Institute Manager, Bachelor of Teaching, Marist Brothers

Antonio explained that being sent to the library to undertake research into learning theories for a presentation to the class was the first experience he had of doing research. He had undertaken some simple research in relation to his work in TL looking at company standards in Indonesia but nothing like the task of reading about research undertaken to develop theory. During this process of researching for his presentation on learning theories he recalled his difficulty in understanding the language used and expressed how this 'shocked' him. After the presentation he felt pleased that he had learned something new. Sometimes in class we would talk and he could not relate it back to the theories but when I asked them to reflect on their own experiences and share these with the class he began to understand how the theories related. He thought it was very helpful to acknowledge and reflect on what the students already knew from their teaching experience. My style of teaching was very different from what he was used to in TL. There "*the teacher is always with us in the classroom*" and the students always "*focus on the tasks the teacher gives us*". Initially he was 'shocked' by my style of teaching but came to understand the practice of reflecting and using past experience to inform his learning:

> *With you very different because you gave us tasks to do individually by ourselves. This is good because we can reflect on what we already know.*

Daily journal writing was new to him and at first he wrote down what he had learned that day. It took some time for his understanding of critical analysis to transfer to his journal writing where he would extend his entry to include how he might use this new learning in his future work/teacher role. He found independent learning difficult generally, but pointed out the language was particularly difficult for him in reading and he was not confident in interpreting what he was reading. One of the strategies he used to cope with this lack of skill and confidence was to use Google Translate to convert text to either Bahasa or Portuguese. He added that he believes all the students used Google Translate and they consulted with each other to interpret meaning and make sense of texts. Antonio emphasised that whom he had been allocated in his apartment had an impact on his ability to learn. For instance, Nicolau had more experience in vocational education than Antonio but he was in a different apartment. Antonio said it would have been easier if Nicolau had been in his apartment so they could work together at night. As well as the formal work required by me for the course, in his apartment the students had informal discussions about their learning and this was very helpful. He did not use the library much because the language in the books was too difficult for him to translate. He relied on the internet and Google and felt his fellow students did the same. Guest speakers proved difficult for Antonio to understand and he recalls that after guest speakers had departed, he would ask me to explain the content of the presentation so he could fully understand it.

Antonio found the assessment task for learning and teaching difficult. The task involved linking the learning outcomes through the coursework documents to the assessment tasks. This learning transformed the way he prepares his learning plans and assessment tasks and he feels confident that he is a better teacher than before. He used to be confused and felt that learning to 'unpack' the National Qualifications Standards for VET to learn "*how we can define that this*

standard is at level 1 or this other one is at level 2" has given him the ability to 'unpack' many things about his life and work:

> *My study was interesting. Improve my knowledge in VET, language and the culture in Melbourne.*

Researcher comments:

> We used the term 'unpack' in the classroom when systematically taking apart a unit of learning to understand the steps a student needs to take in sequence before being able to move to a higher unit of learning.

He also commented that he looked at Dili differently when he returned to TL and found himself questioning processes and methodologies. He has been able to transfer his learning to his life generally and not just to his teaching:

> *After Melbourne I think of things that I want to learn more. I am inspired to know more.*

He reported still doing research on the internet but added that the internet in TL is very slow and sometimes drops out. He feels he applies what he has learnt and has improved the processes in his training institute.

In thinking about what could have improved the student experience in Australia, he thoughtfully suggested they could have been given more time for reading and research tasks to allow for translation and informal discussion before coming to class. This will be discussed in the following section.

6.3.3 Discussion and Analysis

In this section I explore the issues identified by the students and refer to evidence based research to more fully explore the issues common to all groups of sojourners. However it is important to stress that this group could not be considered an ordinary group of international students. Firstly these were not students from different nations randomly thrown together. They belonged to the same nation – TL. Although they did not all know each other well, their cultural adaptation was supported by the group as a whole as they grappled with culture shock. They discussed facets of their adaptation as a group and within their shared apartments. Secondly they did not volunteer to enrol in the GCVET but rather were handpicked by the TL Government to come to Australia to develop their knowledge of the VET infrastructure and epistemology. There was an expectation they would return to TL and contribute more deeply to the development of TVET in their country. They had a common goal. Understanding the role each of them had in the development of TVET in their nation built individual and group respect at a faster pace than perhaps a random group would have experienced. Thirdly the nature of the group as mature age students, with career goals to achieve and sharing common backgrounds, meant some of them may have had their needs met within the group and may not have actively sought friendships with local students. They may have been satisfied in sharing personal issues

and finding ways to improve their work processes within the group. In these ways, this group was different from other groups of international students therefore previous research on the experience of groups of international students may only partially apply to this group. In my discussion I adhere to the themes which evolved from the focus group but have created a new order to reflect the impact as I saw it of these themes and I have added some new themes which emerged from the four interviews.

Language and communication

The issues of language experienced by these students were multifaceted owing in part to the complexity of their own national history. The challenges were most pronounced in the intricate social-political history of TL resulting in a national language policy where Tetun and Portuguese are recognised as 'official languages' while Bahasa Indonesian and English are recognised as 'working languages' (Macpherson, 2011). Portuguese was the first language of TL under Portuguese colonisation for 400 years until the withdrawal of the Portuguese in 1975. During the Indonesian invasion from 1975 until 1999 Bahasa was the language used in schools with textbooks being printed in Bahasa. Since 1999 Portuguese has been re-instated as the basic language of education (Macpherson, 2011). This has caused major difficulty for teachers as most students do not speak Portuguese at home so teaching them in Portuguese becomes futile. In his study on educational administration in TL, Macpherson states most teachers will use Tetun as the medium of instruction and many classroom discussions are undertaken in both Bahasa and Tetun. Children commonly say Portuguese is too hard to learn and will opt to use Tetun which they speak in their homes. New textbooks are written in Portuguese according to government policy, but many teachers still use old Indonesian textbooks. Parents do not want their children schooled in Portuguese. Macpherson (2011, p. 189) explains:

> Parents schooled in Indonesian indicated that Portuguese was far less useful as a trading language than Bahasa, and not as 'international' as English given the imminent arrival of the internet and opportunities offered in Australia. School directors and teachers explained in Tetun and Bahasa that they resented attending mandatory professional development workshops in Portuguese after school hours.

A lack of understanding of the English language by the majority of the group proved to be an issue both for the students and for me. There were two elements to the language issue. The first was their lack of knowledge and practice of the English language, coupled with my inability to speak a language they were fluent in, such as Bahasa or Portuguese. The second was that they reverted to Tetun as the default language when they needed to make sense together of what we were discussing, as the range in ages from 27 to 58 meant some of the younger students did not understand Portuguese and some of the older students did not understand Bahasa. This was an issue for them because Tetun is an unsophisticated language which traditionally did not have a written format. Often Tetun did not provide for them the words to describe philosophy, learning theories and other multifarious issues making the process of understanding more complex for them. This was apparent also in the individual interviews of the four students where lack of appropriate vocabulary in English thwarted their attempts to

elucidate on their personal learning experiences. Their responses often included long moments of hesitation while they unsuccessfully searched their brains for appropriate language to describe complex feelings, only to repeat what they had answered to a previous question.

In the focus group the students expressed their initial difficulty in understanding my Australian accent, stating they learned their English mostly from UN workers in TL. Taylor-Leech (2009, p. 106) describes an "unplanned and piecemeal" approach to the provision of English language tuition in TL "delivered mainly by individual volunteer placements, friendship groups, religious organisations, private providers and goodwill agreements with Australian universities". She states that TL students arriving in Australia to undertake study often have "minimal levels of English and need long periods of language preparation before commencing their courses". This aligns with my own finding that the TL students arrived in Australia with insufficient English skills to study at a post-graduate certificate level. One day per week at the university's English Language Institute was inadequate to address their English language needs so I was compelled to develop teaching methods which would enhance our means of communication and therefore their ability to learn (see Chapter 5, Section 5.8). Group work, mind maps, and allowing discussions in Tetun with an appointed spokesperson reporting back to me in English became essential learning tools.

Epistemological context - Making assumptions in communication

Coupled with the students' lack of understanding of the English language, it could be argued there was a lack of cultural pre-understandings when entering into a conversation with an Australian teacher. A conversation between people of a similar culture will have inherent understood values whose interpretation will influence the understanding of the conversation. Stephenson (2000) firstly draws on the work of Geertz (1973) to stress the symbolic nature of culture that retains an openness to further interpretations, stressing the need to distinguish between the intersubjective meanings produced by those we are investigating and the sense the researchers make of these interpretations. Stephenson (2000) then draws on the work of Habermas (1990) who asserts there are three validity claims which constitute a background consensus of normal everyday language use in western society. These three validity claims are based on truth, appropriateness and sincerity. He states that if we accept these validity claims then we should accept that:

> 'in principle' our own perceptions and utterances have the same status as those who we are seeking to understand. We should, according to Habermas, open ourselves up to reciprocal forms of conversation without having previously decided who is going to learn from whom. This would entail giving up the perspective of the 'observer' for an equal partner in conversation. (Stephenson, 2000, p. 28)

Habermas warns against assuming in advance that we necessarily understand the other's background assumptions. He is clear in stating the process of interpretation is inevitably tied to the horizons or value judgements of the interpreter. The TL students came from a culture where the teacher is at the centre of all learning. As an Australian teacher I practice in a culture where

student centred learning is the norm. Our collective value judgements and assumptions required realignment before we could communicate at a level where the students understood they were not going to learn from me; they were going to learn with me. It was difficult for me to get them to the point where they understood I also had much to learn from them. This realignment was risky business as it was important for them not to lose faith in my ability as the facilitator of their learning. To avoid this I emphasised their contribution, their own life experience through their work and their learning, which I respectfully acknowledged. The data reveal this was valued by them, and that they had something to offer me, as Nicolau stated:

> As soon as we entered classroom you recognised we had knowledge we brought with us. We were considered as adult learners.

The experience of living and studying in another culture provided these students with an opportunity to compare their own education system with one based on a different premise of learning. As Paulo noted:

> I have always questioned the style of learning in TL and Indonesia and when I get to Australia I am frustrated it has taken so long to experience this.

Paulo, in his interview, conceded that he felt guilty for many months after he returned to TL. This guilt stemmed from not making the most of an opportunity which had been offered to him in coming to Australia to study. His IELTS score for English was the highest in the group at 5.5 and he had experience of studying in Australia previously. I had noted in him a lazy leadership skill coupled with a sense of already knowing and not having to make an effort to know more. During his interview I came to realise that I had made an assumption about his laziness based on my knowledge of English speaking students. This was verified in his interview when he addressed his difficulty in writing in English despite having advanced reading and writing skills in English:

> I can understand all the presentations and reading but as soon as I want to express this understanding in writing I am not able to do this. Reading no problem, listening no problem, writing big problem. As soon as you ask me to write down what I understand I started getting frustrated – complicated meaning of the words, complicated structure of the language. But if I make more effort and have more opportunity I may make it.

Paulo was the only student to express disappointment in his own commitment to his study in Australia. Other students admitted they found the study difficult because of their lack of English but did not express disappointment in the effort they placed on developing their English language skills. It appears Paulo allowed his frustrations with writing in English to interfere with his engagement with a pedagogy different from his experience in a cultural context different from TL.

Schweisfurth (2012, p. 88) notes some recent literature promotes critical reflection of our understanding of teaching and learning in different contexts. She contends this has the potential

to promote questioning of the more elusive "comparative dimensions of difference, rooted in epistemologies shaped by particular cultural frameworks, and teaching and learning practices shaped by local preferences and realities". She states that if exploring difference in epistemologies in different cultural contexts does not underpin the transitional experience of international students, it is an opportunity lost. The data reveal that some students openly comment on the differences they perceived in epistemologies between their culture and what they experienced in Australia. For example, Antonio was 'shocked' by my style of teaching and Jose was 'excited' when he came to understand the implications for his own learning in using critical thinking skills. Paulo declared the "*dynamic, flexible and self-oriented system*" (in Australia) was a challenge. Nicolai stated he was used to assessment by written examination and initially found work based assessment very challenging. Antonio commented that in TL all resources come from the teacher whereas in Australia "*activities come from yourself, your learning comes from research on your own*". Teachers must also be active in exploring differences in epistemologies in different cultural contexts so their preparation includes assisting students to learn how to learn differently. The students reported that in TL the teacher was the centre of their learning and all assessment was conducted by written examination. The teacher would tell them what they needed to know. In Australia teachers are trained to present activities and assessment in various formats to cater for different learning styles. As an example, introducing the TL students to the format of mind maps firstly required tuition (see Chapter 5, Section 5.10) in how to develop mind maps before they understood what was required of them. On returning to TL several students have reported successfully using mind maps in teaching adult workers to better understand their work role. Jose reported that workers in institutions in TL generally do not know what to do at work because they have no job description. He has successfully used mind maps to help Government workers map their daily activities, so they can better understand the structure of their work role.

Individual Time

Hofstede's (1980) research on individualist and collectivist cultures helps us to understand that in a collectivist culture there is a focus on mutual obligation and expectations, so that individuals tend to subordinate their own needs to defer to those of the group. Individualist cultures focus on individual rights, autonomy and self-fulfilment. Coming from a collectivist culture, the TL students' experience in Australia of an individualist culture provided some with a joyous sense of freedom while others felt perplexed at the move away from the group doing everything together. Triandis (1988) believes in collectivist cultures that individuals tend to have in-groups where they are looked after in return for loyalty. He describes in-groups as "groups of people about whose welfare one is concerned, with whom one is willing to cooperate without demanding equitable returns, and separation from whom leads to discomfort or even pain" (p. 75). In the focus group some students admitted they had not anticipated that Australians would value individual time, and they initially felt perplexed at being left on their own on some weekends. They reported feeling isolated and alone. This created anxiety about what would happen to them on the weekends if they experienced a crisis. I had not explained to them about dialling emergency services on 000 as I had demonstrated how to call reception at their

accommodation which provided 24 hour attendance. I also gave them my mobile number, believing that the decision to call 000 if necessary could be made at the time of their call. I believed this supported my obligation to provide them with a contingency plan in case of an emergency but I failed to anticipate their anxiety at not having their community to assist them. As they explained in the focus group it took them some time to understand that in Australia we have emergency services that can be called to assist in emergency circumstances. They expressed huge relief at this realisation. Perhaps it was this understanding (that individuals would be assisted by emergency services) which prompted some members of the group to take advantage of the freedom to choose to spend time away from the group, while this reassurance was not sufficient for others to adapt to individual time away from the group.

Time management

Arriving on time for class which commenced at 9.15am each day initially presented as a challenge to some students. Some arrived on time from the commencement of the twelve week period and it was interesting to note these were students who had previously studied outside TL. Others transitioned to punctuality gradually. Edward Hall (1983) describes two types of task scheduling amongst different cultures. M-time (monochronism) refers to undertaking one task at a time with a pre-set schedule. M-timers tend to end discussions or meetings to enable keeping to a pre-set schedule. P-time (polychronism) refers to undertaking several tasks involving several people with a tendency to modify a pre-set schedule to accommodate people. P-timers seldom experience time as wasted and are committed to persons rather than schedules. An example of how M-time operates in the TL culture was provided by a student in her final presentation. Carla worked for a government agency implementing funding for small business start-ups. She and her colleagues would travel in four-wheel drive vehicles, sometimes for up to four hours over treacherous roads to visit small agricultural businesses to determine if the business required supplementary funding. One of the problems encountered in visiting these small businesses in remote areas was that communication was minimal. There were no telephones or internet. Often Carla would arrive at the pre-arranged meeting time to find no-one in attendance. This would generally be the result of a family celebration or commitment taking precedence over a pre-scheduled meeting. The TL students in Melbourne came to understand the importance of punctuality in coming to class and meeting their mentors however an experience where I invited the whole group to lunch on a Sunday but without apology several did not attend demonstrated that newly learned behaviours often give way to old habits.

Carrying money and paying for themselves

The issue they had with carrying money and paying for themselves was obvious to me on occasions during their sojourn in Australia. They would often ask me if they needed to bring money when I organised weekend outings. It did not become automatic to carry money even as their sojourn drew to a close although they each had a bank account into which the university placed a stipend on a fortnightly basis. The TL custom of paying for guests in all circumstances left them confused in Australia when they were invited to an outing as to whether they would be guests or expected to pay for themselves. There are undefined customs in Australia around

inviting people to go out which proved difficult for the Timorese to decipher. An invitation to someone's home in TL requires no contribution from the guest whereas in Australia taking a bottle of wine, flowers or chocolates is customary. An invitation to a sporting event in Australia may require a person to carry money to purchase their own refreshments. In TL it would be unlikely for drinks, ice-creams and food to be available to purchase at a sporting event. The students demonstrated the depth of Timorese hospitality on our last night in TL when some of them invited my colleague and I to a restaurant for dinner. All students had been invited and one student collected us by car and drove us to the restaurant. Despite our offer to help cover the costs of the dinner and drinks, we were reminded that it is Timorese custom to pay for guests.

6.4 THE TEACHER/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP WHERE TEACHER IS RESEARCHER

If the goal of research is to understand, while the goal of teaching is to act responsibly and morally, what are the implications of these differences? (Wong, 1993, p. 1). The students did not express any perceived conflict in my dual role as their teacher and a university researcher.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The data from the students reveal issues with differences in language, pedagogy and culture. They demonstrated that having insufficient English language skills to express themselves both verbally and in writing was frustrating and limited their ability to learn. Their native language, Tetun, does not have the vocabulary to describe concepts such as learning theories and evidence based research, and the concept of critical thinking skills was unknown to them in their experience of a teacher centred pedagogy. Experiencing this new approach to pedagogy, where they were responsible for their own learning, produced confusion and self-doubt in some, and enormous excitement in others. In addition, the confusion of adapting culturally from a collectivist, high power distance culture to an individualist, low power distance culture compounded their anxiety which inhibited their initial adaptation to both the teacher and the learning. In the next chapter I will draw together the findings from both the autoethnography and the case study and address the possibilities uncovered by this research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1   INTRODUCTION

This research has specifically explored the development of the teacher-student relationship between myself, a teacher from a developed country, and students from TL, a least developed country, studying in Australia. The research questions have been considered throughout the project and are included here to provide the reader with a point of reference for this chapter.

Research question

What are the experiences and understandings of both teachers and students in drawing together educators from developed countries and students from least developed countries settings where the program is conducted in a developed county setting with the intention that learnings from it be implemented in a least developed country setting?

Subsidiary questions

PART 1 – THE TEACHER

> What happens when an educator from a developed country, in her own environment, is drawn together with students in an environment new to them? What particular strategies did the educator develop to assist her to deal with difference? What teaching strategies did the educator develop to assist her to move from understanding and applying, through to analysing, evaluating and creating, and working together effectively?

PART 2 – THE STUDENTS

> What practices did students develop to cater for the cultural differences they experienced in the program? How was the relationship with the students perceived to be fostered by the Australian teacher educator? How did the students adapt to learning in a new environment? What coping strategies did they develop to enhance their learning potential? How did the students adapt to communication techniques used? How did the students cope with the interaction required for group and independent learning? What plans did the students develop for implementation on return to TL of what they learned in the program?

The development of the teacher-student relationship was dependent upon cultural adaptation by both myself and the students as we came to terms with cultural difference. This research is based on the premise of TL being a high context culture and Australia being a low context culture. As established in Chapter Two, the literature explains high context cultures as collectivist, preferring group consensus to individual decision making, where communication

relies heavily on context. In these cultures there is a tendency towards a didactic pedagogy; a pedagogy of instruction where students are not actively encouraged to use critical thinking skills. Conversely low context cultures are individualistic, communication relies on words and facts rather than intuition, and reasoning is part of the decision making process. In Australia, a student centred learning environment actively seeks the use of critical thinking skills. In addition to these differences in culture, TL is a country with a recent history of invasion and war, which is in contrast to Australia. Some of the students had not previously travelled outside of TL and most had poor IELTS (English language testing) scores. As a group they lacked sufficient underpinning knowledge and skills to study at Level 8 on the AQF and they did not understand this in agreeing to study in Australia. Furthermore, my experience in TL was limited to one week prior to receiving the students in Australia, and I had limited experience in teaching students from a culture different from my own. Despite identifying my own intuitive approach to my teaching, both past and present, the differences in our cultures meant there was a chasm between myself (the teacher) and the students. This research has revealed how the bridge to understanding was shaped through the use of reflexivity and persistence by all participants.

Using a combination of researcher lenses to gather and analyse the data enabled me to be a participant in my own research. Autoethnography permitted me to write from my heart, thereby allowing others from both inside and outside my culture to become familiar with the characteristics that distinguish it. In seeking to understand my own place in the human interactions of this particular social context, I allowed the themes to emerge from the data. The fifteen vignettes which constitute my autoethnography describe an emergent process, progressively revealing the very personal struggle I experienced in dealing with students from a culture different from my own. The use of case study method allowed the student experience to be revealed through a focus group and four in-depth interviews. The focus group had the potential to give voice to all participating students. A discussion in both Tetun and English allowed the free expression of feelings and anxieties, resulting in a richness of data propelled by ideas overflowing and tumbling out. Four hour-long interviews allowed me to explore those ideas in greater depth. The data from both the focus group and the interviews of the students were presented initially from an emic perspective in recording what the students said, and subsequently from an etic perspective characterised as discussion and analysis by the researcher. In contrast to the data for my autoethnography, which was recorded while I was teaching the students, the focus group and interviews were undertaken at the completion of the students' qualification and once their results had been recorded. This encouraged the students to contribute without fear of reprisal. A relationship of trust, established over the year I had been teaching the students, alleviated apprehension for them and provided me with a platform from which to launch directly into reflection on their experiences.

This chapter synthesises the data by drawing together the realisations of the teacher as she confronts her own cultural adaptation and the observations of the students as they reflect on their experience of studying in Australia. Firstly I discuss the growth of my practise of autoethnography through the development of a framework I call a structured vignette analysis. Secondly, I reflect on the parallel pathways of cultural adaptation of both myself and the

students and how this could have been approached differently. Finally the limitations and the contributions of the study are explored and I put forward some recommendations for further research.

7.2   DEVELOPING THE PRACTISE OF WRITING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

A dilemma arose for me in the writing of my autoethnography. The researchers whose writings I consulted to guide me in developing my autoethnography used incongruent terms to denote their narrative writing. *Anecdote* and *vignette* are terms often interchanged in qualitative research methodology and in seeking an explanation of their interchangeability I consulted the *Sage Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods.* This encyclopaedia does not contain an entry for anecdote and it described vignettes as "stimuli that selectively portray elements of reality to which research participants are invited to respond" (Hughes, 2008, p. 918). I could find no entry for vignettes as autobiographical stories written within an autoethnography. However, Ellis et al. (2011), Humphreys (2005) and Ronai (1995) define the text of their personal experiences within autoethnography as vignettes. In contrast, Van Manen (2014) offers a set of guidelines for writing powerful narrative material within an anecdote – a short, simple story describing a single incident which commences close to the moment of experience (the pre-reflective moment or epoche) and ends with a punchy last line. My intention was to explore my own cultural adaptation to teaching students from a traumatised, least developed country and Van Manen's guidelines provided me with a structure. Initially I wrote fifteen anecdotes as a personal narrative discourse to place myself within the pre-reflective moment, the epoche, of selected existential crises. I wrote these individual anecdotes without an overarching narrative and when read individually they may mean little to the reader. To bring meaning to these anecdotes I developed a six step framework, which I have titled a 'structured vignette analysis', to reveal layers of awareness around the anecdote that might otherwise remain experienced but concealed (Pitard, 2016). This framework constructively describes the context, the experience told as a personal story (anecdote), the emotional impact on me and my reflexivity to it, as well as exploring the strategies I developed in subsequently dealing with my students. My framework reinforces the necessity for all of these essential research elements to be included in autoethnographic writing. Research into the interchangeability of the terms anecdote and vignette within autoethnography resulted in my preference to use the term *vignette* to describe my six step structured framework and *anecdote* to record my narrative within the vignette (Pitard, 2016). In my writing I refer to my six step framework (context, anecdote, emotional impact, reflexivity, strategies developed and concluding remarks) as a *vignette,* within which nestles my personal narrative written as an *anecdote*. I have written my anecdote in the present tense as it is the recreation of the epoche, the pre-reflective moment. It is presented in italics to distinguish it within my vignette, as the anecdote is central to the vignette.

7.3 CONSDIERATION OF ETHICAL ISSUES

The teacher as researcher position I occupied in this research raises issues of ethics, particularly as the students, the subjects of my case study, are from a developing country and therefore deemed to be vulnerable (Simpson, 2011). Cochran-Smith (1999) states that if the teacher as researcher role applies, Huberman (1996) suggests the classic criteria of qualitative research should apply. The teacher research is bound by rules for the "provision of evidence, consistency, freedom from obvious bias and perceptions of the people involved" (Huberman, 1996, p. 128). Cochran-Smith contends the teacher as researcher must transcend the self in an effort to move from an emic perspective to a wider etic view. My choice of research methods was made in order to give a balanced view of the experience of both myself, as teacher, and the students. As positioning is a defining feature of embedded research, I invested time and energy in building a trusting relationship with the students by divulging stories of my own life and listening to their stories. I have made every effort not to disclose the identity of these students although I concede this is difficult as the TL community is small. In considering the students as I portray them in this research, it is possible representations of background, previous study and places of employment could provide indicators for general recognition of individuals within the group. All care has been taken to use pseudonyms, to not identify training institutions or work histories.

7.4 PARALLEL PATHWAYS IN CULTURAL ADAPTATION

7.4.1 *Searching for an understanding of the 'other'*

Constructing a perspective on the students which could direct my approach to their learning proved far more difficult than I had anticipated. My week in TL provided me with visual images of destruction and poverty within the dichotomy of human pride and endeavour. I was bewildered by signs of strength in citizens forgiving former war crimes so as to encourage investment in the rebuilding of skills in their country. Allowing my own way of seeing the world, with assumptions accumulated throughout a lifetime, to transpose itself on the experience of the people of TL frustrated my attempts to truly understand them. In alignment with my own attempt to understand the cultural differences between us, each student was contending with being thrust into a cultural unknown where they would be living very closely with fellow countrymen they hardly knew, in a climate and culture vastly different from their own. What the data reveal to us is a group of adult students confronted by differences in culture, in a way of being that raised issues for them of expressing themselves without adequate language, dealing differently with people in positions of authority (power distance), fearing for their personal safety without the support of community (discovering emergency services), developing critical thinking skills and the associated move away from group thinking (collectivism versus individualism), embracing and filtering issues of conscience (requests for donations), carrying currency for individual expenses (to pay or not to pay) and determination of one's own fate (transformational learning). This is not an exhaustive list, however the complexity of just the issues mentioned here evoked a level of anxiety in the students which impacted their ability to concentrate on their

learning within the coursework. Simultaneously, I, as the teacher, was moving from a position of the unknown through to a position of knowing, understanding, acting, doing. I was intent on transitioning the students from teacher centred pedagogy to independent learning where they recognised their own contribution to their scholarship. In addition, I played the role of researcher, collecting data, observing, practising reflexivity, experimenting with strategies to overcome the difficulties as perceived by me. Through reflecting on and writing their story, I became part of it. I was in it, experiencing it from the inside and observing it from the outside. I acted in dual roles. I too was transposed into a different way of being as a teacher and researcher. Together we faltered as we encountered unanticipated conflict within our habitual existences, shifting foundations of communication, courtesy, ways of thinking, and means of survival, adjusting to differences in life experience with those to whom we were compelled to build a working relationship. We managed to surge ahead in a stumbling fashion, determination steering us safely through the maze of cultural diversity.

It became evident that transporting students from their home environment and within 36 hours placing them into a classroom in a university in a developed world, so easily achieved with the help of modern aviation, disallows the time to process this transition and the emergent emotional responses which accompany such a swift physical passage. Both teacher and student progressed slowly in their quest to understand who their companions-in-learning would be for the coming twelve weeks. Juxtaposed positions where the teacher is the stranger within the classroom (outnumbered) but the students become the stranger in the wider university weighed heavily on emotional responses as the students had a new pedagogy thrust upon them. In addition, dealing with extreme (to them) cold weather sapped their energy and their ability to concentrate.

7.3.2   Using the term 'shock'

The word 'shock' appears in this thesis over thirty times. Sometimes it is coupled with 'culture' and sometimes with 'learning'. In Chapter 2 I explain the terms 'cultural shock' and 'learning shock' and how these are common experiences of international sojourners. Often in this thesis the word shock is used as a verb by both myself, the teacher, and the students to describe what we were experiencing. The question that must be asked is "what would have prevented either me or the students from feeling 'shocked'?". The students have suggested that better preparation before they departed TL would have assisted in their cultural adaptation. The data from my autoethnography suggests better preparation and more thoughtful approaches to how both the students and I would learn together could have assisted in avoiding my cultural shock. What is clear from the data are that neither party to this experience of cultural adaptation had understood the impact that our cultural differences would have on both the learning experience and the experience of personal growth. If we had anticipated the impact of the cultural shock, we would have approached our coming together with greater preparation. In fact, the experience of cultural shock wasted valuable learning time in the graduate qualification they came to Australia to complete. My 25 years of teaching experience supported my ability to constantly adapt my teaching strategies to cater for the observed deficiency in underpinning

knowledge, English language and critical thinking skills of the students. While these teaching strategies are integral to my teaching, the data reveal strategies which could be implemented by others for future experiences which involve both preparation for and delivery of any qualification presented to a group of students from a least developed country.

7.3.3 You don't know what you don't know until you are confronted by it. A learn as you go approach to cultural adaptation.

Initially confused by a culture so different from my own, the practise of reflexivity supported me in developing teaching strategies to cope with student language inadequacies, lack of previous knowledge of critical thinking skills, and inexperience in research skills and independent learning by the students. These strategies included:

- involving the students in the delivery of their own learning by inviting them to lead group discussions in Tetun

- promoting group learning so they could learn from each other

- developing group mind maps so they could follow the process of critical thinking

- inviting guest speakers who had contributed to the development of Timor as an emerging nation

- appointing mentors who could show rather than tell about the delivery of VET in Australia.

In developing my relationship with the students, I guided them in identifying the knowledge they brought with them into the classroom and how to use that knowledge through critical thinking skills. This process promoted their self-confidence and inspired them to know more. They began to share with me the areas they were having difficulty in understanding, both in the TVET system in TL and in their learning in Australia. Together we built a relationship of trust where they came to appreciate a teacher admitting she does not know everything but is willing to seek the assistance of an expert in the field to inform the group, thereby introducing them to some of those Australians who have worked in Timor to build their nation. At the same time, students adapted to language and cultural differences with innovative (for them) approaches such as using Google Translate, discussing in groups within their apartments Australian cultural characteristics they did not understand, and finding the courage to bring their questions to me, their teacher, so they could make sense of what they were learning. Specific suggested strategies for assisting cultural adaptation are outlined below.

Language - The students suggested 3-4 months of intense English language skills development in TL prior to travelling to Australia would have greatly assisted their cultural adaptation. The Australian accent was difficult for them to understand. As their teacher, I would have compensated for this had I understood their difficulty with my accent at the time. They felt homestay with Australian families would have assisted their English language development

rather than living with fellow students in apartments where they reverted to conversation in Tetun because it was easy. Academic English language often has no equivalent in Tetun so having a list of academic terms with explanations might have been helpful. They also felt translating reading material into Tetun or Portuguese before giving it to them would have been helpful although this might have the effect of detracting from their need to deepen their understanding of English.

Weather – The cold weather affected their ability to learn and to concentrate. The students suggested that in future students should come to Australia at a time when the weather is warmer, such as Spring, Autumn or ideally Summer. Although I collected donations of winter coats and distributed these to the students, if I had known how deeply affected they were by the cold, I could have taken further steps to reduce the impact for them.

Cultural characteristics – Both the students and the teacher would have benefitted by being more aware of the detail of the differences in cultures of both countries. My knowledge of culture shock and differences in cultures has been enhanced through this research. If I had known then what I know now, the mutual experience of cultural shock may have been a different experience for us both. An understanding by the students of how their own high context culture, with a collectivist mentality and a didactic, teacher centred approach to learning, differs from a low context culture, with an individualist mentality and a student centred approach to learning, might have contributed to a lower incidence of culture and study shock, allowing a swifter transition to learning in a different environment. Confusion may have been reduced, both for the students and the teacher, if greater emphasis had been placed on identifying and understanding the differences in cultures for both. An open discussion on these differences at the commencement of the student sojourn in Australia could have promoted a deeper appreciation of the role of culture in defining how we experience the world. Previously unknown characteristics of Australian culture identified by the students include: who to greet and who not to greet, carrying money and paying for oneself, unwritten rules of hosting and being hosted for meals, having individual time on weekends, making decisions based on self rather than the group, availability of emergency services to deal with threatening issues, learning systems such as ticketed public transport and ATMs, dealing with choice in purchasing goods, being asked to support causes, tolerance of religion and multiculturalism, and the importance of punctuality. In addition to these confusing characteristics, I often spontaneously gave the students a physical pat on the back in moments of their achievement or shared their revelations of understanding with the group so everyone could learn from the one. This exuberance for their learning and achievement must have taken some time to accept as gestures of reassurance.

Relationship of trust - Trust between people is built over time. Contributing factors to the building of trust between myself, the teacher, and the students were identified by the students as open friendliness in welcoming the students at the airport, remembering their names as quickly as possible, giving clear instructions and getting to the point of a conversation quickly, asking questions to gain feedback on student progress and being inclusive of everyone in the group. Involving students in their learning by asking individuals to explain to the group a

concept in Tetun, and then translating back into English the gist of the ensuing group discussion to assure me of their understanding, was seen as very trusting. They felt empowered by this gesture. They described my attitude as professional yet caring, sometimes providing my time to them on weekends, which they saw as not part of my teaching role. Students made particular comment on the connection I made between their new learning and their lives outside the classroom. They said this was particularly enlightening for them when they understood how they use their learning in their everyday lives. This connection switched on a 'light bulb' for some. My trust in them was enhanced through their commitment to attending every day and coming to class prepared. The students suggested more time be given to future students to prepare work for class, which leads us into strategies for enhancing the sojourner experience.

7.3.4 Strategies for the future

What has been highlighted through this research is the impact cultural difference had on the ability of these students to initiate their own learning of the coursework. Differences in cultural norms, communication and language impeded their ability to commence the learning, which was the objective of their travel to Australia. Consequently, learning how to exist in a low context, low power distance, modernised culture became the hidden curriculum. As their teacher, initially I concentrated on introducing them to evidence based research, learning theories, critical thinking, and academic writing, without fully acknowledging the struggle they were experiencing in understanding how to survive in a culture different from theirs. I understood that learning in Australia was different for them in comparison to their previous experience of learning in TL, but I did not appreciate the enormous energy loss and emotional disturbance caused by the hidden curriculum of the school of cultural difference. Establishing an overt curriculum on cultural difference for the first two weeks of their sojourn would, I believe, have enhanced their ability to absorb the learning in the qualification more rapidly. At the stage when the students arrived into my care I did not have the knowledge or ability to introduce cultural difference into the curriculum, as it is my learning since undertaking this research which helps me to see it so clearly now. How different our journey together might have been if we had undertaken together, for that first two weeks of their sojourn, an exercise in understanding the differences and how to manage them. Equally, returning to TL having experienced transformative learning and the autonomy of critical thinking skills, the students might have benefited from a thoughtfully prepared lead-out tutorial. I assisted through leading them in a summary of how much they had learnt during their time in Australia, however recognising how much they had grown intellectually and emotionally falls far short of receiving expert professional advice on how to handle that difference on their return to their own culture.

Re-interviewing the students three years after their return to TL may reveal the impact of their sojourn in Australia on their professional and private lives, and to what extent they have impacted the development of the TVET infrastructure in TL. For example, one student has developed a Facebook page to highlight the achievements of his institute in developing training facilities and courses, and has developed a following which includes interested people from

many different countries. However, logistically this would be a difficult exercise as I have lost contact with most of the students.

Another issue highlighted by this research is the lack of support from my university in preparing both the students, inexperienced in student centred learning, and me, an experienced teacher but with little prior experience of teaching international students, for the role required of us. Several issues arose. The students were immersed at a level of learning (AQF 8) which requires pre-requisite skills, including independent thinking. The GCVET had a pre-requisite of previous study at AQF level 5, which my experience with Australian students informed me was satisfactory for students with previous experience of a teacher-centred pedagogy, where critical thinking skills are embedded into the curriculum. It was very different for these students, as they had little or no experience of such a teacher-centred pedagogy. This was coupled with a lack of English language skills, which for some students meant they could not participate in the learning. On reflection, the ethics of immersing the students in a level of study for which they did not have the required knowledge, experience or language skills, is questionable. A lack of foresight in anticipating this dilemma rests with the university and should be seriously considered in policy development for future groups of international students. The students from TL were asked to self-evaluate their English language skills, with the help of the attaché from the TL Embassy, but were not formally tested until requested by me after their arrival in Australia, and consequently their acceptance into the course. This situation placed extra strain on them and on me, the teacher.

During the teaching process I was quite obviously experiencing health issues yet I received no teaching support. This lack of support was not intentional as my immediate manager was constrained by an implied restriction on funding, and at the time, was under pressure due to yet another re-organisation of university structure. I believe it would have been helpful if those within the university with experience in dealing with such groups of students had predicted the issues with which I would be confronted. Forewarning would have allowed me the opportunity for more careful preparation and to initiate a request for assistance. As stated, it was I who came to realise the importance to the Timorese Government of these students learning the English language, which prompted me to request funding for separate tuition in ESL for the students. Dedicated space within the university was not offered. I had to fend for myself whilst feeling overwhelmed in dealing with students who did not have the required level of prior learning or the language skills to cope with a post-graduate qualification. I am proud of my efforts with these students, who generally elevated themselves to high levels of achievement, developed critical thinking skills at the required level and qualified for the GCVET. A less experienced teacher without my level of expertise and skills might have floundered. In saying this, I recognise that my manager chose me precisely for my experience and skills, yet even I, at times, felt like I was drowning. I hope the needs of future groups of sojourners and their teacher are given more consideration.

7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

An area of unequivocal limitation in this research is the lack of a common language with which to discuss experiences and feelings in depth. I had no knowledge of Tetun, the native language of the students. The students had limited vocabulary and ability to speak English. The outcome was broken sentences spoken with passion but without qualification. When I attempted to clarify points made in the focus group and interviews, I often found the same response repeated. When I asked one student about this he replied that he could not find the language to express what he wanted to say. I conducted the focus group and interviews when I returned to TL nine months after the students had left Australia. In that period there was a noticeable regression in their English language vocabulary and speaking skills. The data are therefore limited by the ability of the students to express themselves. In addition, the pressure of time limited the quantity of data I could gather. The focus group was conducted in the afternoon at the conclusion of student presentations. The students were keen to finish the session by 5pm so they could return home as for some this meant a journey of several hours. Consequently final questions, which were about strategies developed to help them complete their project on their return to TL, were dismissed with little consideration in order to finish the focus group on time. Consequent questions in the four interviews were also answered inadequately but I did not process this until analysing the data. Both distance and language were inhibitors to gaining detailed information once I had returned to Australia.

Time is another factor which may have influenced the quality of the data provided in the case study. I did not conduct the focus group and interviews until 9 months after the students had returned to TL. This lapse in time might have caused a lapse in memory for the students. It is possible their recall of difficulties and emotions, strategies developed and lessons learned could have been more acute if the focus group and interviews were conducted before the students left Australia, however this may have constituted an ethical breach because of my dual role as both teacher and researcher. In an effort to reduce the ethical dilemma of my dual role, I delayed questioning the students until their results were recorded.

I would have preferred to provide copies of my data analysis to the students before publication but I have not done so for several reasons. Firstly I have lost contact with the students (except one on Face Book who states he has lost contact with most fellow students). It appears to be common practice for Timorese to change their email addresses as their internet access fails, and they are often offline for months at a time. Secondly, they often do not have access to printing facilities and do not have computers or access to the internet in their homes. They rely on work facilities for downloading lengthy documents and printing, and often they are restricted in this practice. This would be likely to prevent them from printing and reading my data and analysis. In addition, their limited knowledge of the English language would deter them from reading and understanding my lengthy chapters. I feel frustrated that their valuable contribution to this research may not be conveyed to them, and that they have not had the opportunity of contributing their recall to the events as portrayed. Logistically I am prohibited in re-interviewing the students, as it would involve me travelling to TL and gathering the students for further research purposes. This would place a strain on both the students' time and finances, as many would have to travel long distances to visit Dili. As stated, I have lost contact with many of them.

Lastly, I address the issue of my own selective memory in addressing my subjectivity in relation to the data. Using autoethnography to record the events which impacted my cultural adaptation inherently implies the use of selective memory. The events which were most impactful for me may not have been the same events selected by the students. Concurrently, my previous life experiences may have determined which events I selected to recall and a different teacher may have been impacted differently by the same events. However Part 1 of this research is specific to myself and my experience of teaching these students, and should be interpreted as such. This research involves one group of students and one specific teacher. Another similar research project may achieve different results because of the different personalities involved.

7.5   CONTRIBUTION

This research contributes in several ways to the body of knowledge of both the teaching of students from least developed countries and qualitative research methods Through my research I have developed new theoretical perspectives regarding cultural adaption for sojourning students and their educators. My autoethnography has also highlighted potential contributions to VET policy and teaching practice both in Australia and TL. In addition, I have produced methodological innovation with my framework for producing and analysing autoethnographic vignettes. These contributions are detailed below.

My review of related research studies has revealed numerous studies of international and refugee students living in Australia with implications of financial hardship and pressure from family members both here and in their homeland, however circumstances were different for this group of students from TL. They received a stipend and accommodation was provided for them so there was no reported experience of financial hardship, accommodation was provided where they lived together as a group. Their difficulties were focused on adapting, in a very short time span, to a culture different from their own, a different (student centred) pedagogy, difficulty expressing themselves in a language in which they were not proficient, difficulty adapting to the cold weather in an individualist culture. These differences make this study significant. This research also contributes to the understanding of the differences in culture and difficulties in undertaking study experienced by students from TL who came to Australia to study. It has the potential to promote greater understanding between universities in Australia and TL in negotiating student sojourns. In addition, it may assist teachers transitioning from teaching local students in Australia to teaching international students. The exposure of coping practices developed by these students, and how they contributed to their own learning as revealed in this case study, is important to record. Practices adopted by the TL students may well apply to international students generally. This could be something akin to holding up a mirror to the educational practices involved in the cultural adjustment of international students and the response of internationalising a curriculum.

My research exposes my sense-making of teaching students from TL for the first time. It is my unique story. It captures my shock and my reflexivity. Whilst this study refers to previous research undertaken on teaching international students from developing nations, the literature has not revealed a similar study of teaching a group of students from TL using autoethnography

and case study method to reveal the development of the teacher-student relationship. The data from the autoethnography may assist teachers to understand their own culture shock, and it may endorse the use of reflexivity in adapting and developing strategies to cope with the differences they experience. They may feel supported by my vignettes in their own struggle in dealing with cultural difference. These teachers may also gain insight into strategies to cater for difference linguistically, culturally and socially. The strategies I describe in my vignettes reveal how I coped with the students' lack of English language skills and their learning shock by encouraging the use of group discussion in their native tongue. I also introduced co-teaching in both Tetun and English; group work involving a strategic mixture of teacher and policy maker/ English proficiency and poor English skills; the use of mind maps in group work to develop critical thinking skills; critical questioning to probe solution building; and encouraging students to reveal to me what they wanted to learn and then demonstrating to them how this could be aligned to the learning outcomes of the course. Matching students to relevant industry mentors was an important part of the students' development. I anticipate these strategies could encourage teachers to be more innovative in their approach to teaching international students. In this way, my research may contribute to the development of VET in Australia, especially in relation to teaching international students.

As the TL students have returned home and continued in their work roles supported by the new knowledge and critical thinking skills they developed in Australia, it is anticipated that the learning they undertook in Australia may have helped to strengthen the TVET infrastructure in TL. This could only be known if further research is undertaken with the same group of students.

My use of autoethnography as a method provoked me into developing my structured vignette analysis as I struggled to write about my experiences without falling into the pattern of a narrative. Understanding the use of the anecdote within the structured vignette to bring attention to the central theme of my vignette also assisted me to understand the importance of context as related directly to the anecdote. The placement of the context in direct relation to the anecdote, followed by my reflexivity allowed each existential crisis to be examined individually. This was an impactful development in my writing for me, and I hope it will inform qualitative research methodology for other researchers using autoethnography as method.

7.6   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN PEOPLE FROM LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES COMING TO AUSTRALIA, AND THOSE THAT TEACH THEM

Learning to adapt in a culture different from their own hindered the ability of the students to develop the teacher-student relationship and commence their learning journey in the coursework. Equally, my own lack of understanding of the cultural norms of the students hindered my ability to help them bridge that gap. The data reveal how the learning of the coursework for these students could have been progressed at an earlier juncture in their sojourn if their understanding of the differences in culture had been addressed initially. For future groups of students from least developed countries I recommend the development of a two or three week course studying the differences in culture using the Hofstede model of cultural

dimensions, in particular collectivism versus individualism and power distance. This course could also cover cultural norms such as who to greet and how to greet them, carrying money, paying for oneself, using public transport, choosing food products, the concept of weekend activities, when and how to use emergency services, and what to do if approached by a spruiker, a beggar, or a person seeking assistance. In addition, the course could include understanding student centred learning, the importance of critical thinking skills, the teacher as facilitator, independent and group work, evidence based research and how to apply it, plagiarism, using Google Translate, and knowing the language to undertake a Google search. This could be helpful information to include in a series of introductory workshops. With further research, the idea of developing a series of workshops on the differences in culture between least developed countries and the culture of Australia could be useful not only for sojourners and teachers, but also for refugees and migrants on their arrival in Australia. Further research could reveal the needs of these additional groups.

In addition, informed by my own experience, an investigation of how teachers of international students are supported (or not) by their universities might reveal what support systems are in place which could be adopted more generally by higher education institutions. This could be accompanied by a study amongst teachers of international students of their use of strategies for moving students from a didactic pedagogy to a student centred pedagogy, and the teaching of critical thinking skills. There may be studies in existence which could be augmented by further research.

7.7   CONCLUSION

Undertaking this research has been an insightful journey of understanding the lived experience of both me and the students. Developing my practice in reflexivity has deepened my capacity for understanding the underlying assumptions we all bring to flourishing relationships. The students engaged in the research process with enthusiasm and truly appreciated that their opinions were valued. Their own capacity for critical thinking and reflection has inspired many of them to achieve great things, both personally and professionally. Every link in the chain of development of the infrastructure in TL strengthens the overall constitution of this developing nation and I hope many more researchers involved in its development will undertake the essential research required to ensure the country develops to its highest potential. The courage of the students I had the privilege to teach constantly sustains me. I wish them well.

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APPENDIX 1

Jayne Pitard PhD Student ID 1092813

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled An exploration of an Australian educator working with vocational education professionals from Timor Leste to develop their knowledge and practice of vocational education.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher Jayne Pitard as part of a PhD study at Victoria University under the supervision of Professor Maureen Ryan, School of Education, and Dr Peter Thomas, School of Education, Victoria University.

Project explanation

In July 2012 you travelled to Australia to undertake study in the Graduate Certificate of VET at Victoria University for 12 weeks. Using a case study approach the researcher will study a sample of students once they have completed their qualification to analyse how they adapted to study in Australia, and more importantly their experiences implementing what they studied in the program on their return to Timor Leste. Analysing themes in the educator approach and the student experience the researcher will identify strategies to assist future programs involving Australian educators and TL students.

What you share will remain confidential and your name will not be used at any time. Your honesty in answering the questions will not prejudice you in any way as your assessment for your study will already have been completed and recorded. The aim of this research is to improve the experience for future groups of students studying in Australia so please do not feel that any criticism will produce bad feeling between you and the researcher. Without honesty, this research will not be of benefit to future groups of students studying in Australia.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in a one hour interview at your place of work and then, on the following day you will be asked to attend at a venue in Dili provided by either SEFOPE or Dili Institute of

Technology for one day. The activities you will participate in on this day may include informal group discussion reflecting on your experience, mind mapping, drawing, sharing some of your journal reflection. Following this day of reflection the researcher may email you with questions seeking further explanation of the data gathered but you will not be required to attend for any further group work.

What will I gain from participating?

Participating in this research will provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your time in Australia and to make sense of your learning experience so that you understand it more fully. This may assist you to understand how you learnt, what helped you to learn and what wasn't helpful about your experience. This knowledge may assist you in future learning experiences. This research is also significant because it will contribute to the understanding of the differences in culture and difficulties in undertaking study experienced by students from TL in Australia.

How will the information I give be used?

The information you provide will be used to critically analyse the experience of the volunteers in studying in Australia. These data may also be used to write journal articles or present conference papers. Electronic data will be stored on the researcher's work laptop which is lockable on a docking station within a secure work area. Each student will be given a number and will be referred to by this number throughout the research process. Ensuring safe and secure storage of data will be paramount throughout the duration of the research however complete confidentiality can never be guaranteed.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

There is a potential risk to you that you may not wish to reveal to the researcher any criticism you may have of the way the learning experience in Australia was conducted. To assist with this, a set of ground rules based on respect will be established before volunteers commence with the research. Also, you may contact either of my supervisors, Prof Maureen Ryan (Maureen.ryan@vu.edu.au) or Dr Peter Thomas (peter.thomas@vu.edu.au) In addition, if you feel at any time that you wish to withdraw from the research you may do so using the form supplied. You may also seek guidance on this from the Director for Vocational Training in Timor, Mr Albano Salem.

How will this project be conducted?

In June 2013, the researcher will travel to Dili for your final project presentations. After these presentations are completed and your assessment recorded, the researcher will ask for volunteers to participate in the research. The following day all volunteers will be asked to attend for the day at a venue in Dili where they will participate in informal group discussion, mind mapping, sharing of journal reflection, drawing etc.

Who is conducting the study?

The researcher is Jayne Pitard, PhD student with Victoria University. Jayne is currently teaching at VU in the Teacher Development Unit. She can be contacted by email (Jayne.pitard@vu.edu.au) or by phone (+61 3 99198396).

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Research Ethics and Biosafety Manager, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 or phone (03) 9919 4148.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

Jayne Pitard would like to invite you to be a part of a research study she is undertaking as part of her PhD with Victoria University into your experience of studying in Australia. Now that you have presented your final report on the implementation of your project as your final assessment for the Graduate Certificate of VET and your grade has been recorded, she is asking for four students to volunteer to be part of my research on their experience of studying in Australia.

The questions she will be asking of the four volunteer students are:

a) What practices did you develop to cater for the cultural differences you experienced in the program?
b) How do you think I (the Australian teacher) fostered my relationship with you? What did you observe me doing to develop my relationship with you?
c) How did you adapt to learning in a new environment? What coping strategies did you develop to enhance your learning potential?
d) How did you adapt to the communication techniques used? How did you cope with the interaction required for group and independent learning?
e) What plans did you develop for implementation on return to TL of what you learned in the program.

To assist you in answering these questions, you will be asked to participate in a one hour interview at your office (Jayne will visit you) and then, on the following day, to attend at a venue in Dili provided by either SEFOPE or Dili Institute of Technology for one day. The activities you will participate in on this day may include informal group discussion reflecting on your experience, mind mapping, drawing, sharing some of your journal reflection. Following this day of reflection as a group, Jayne may email you with further questions seeking further explanation of the data gathered but you will not be required to attend for any further group work.

When you are reflecting on your experience in Australia you may feel awkward in contributing a criticism of the learning experience in case you hurt my feelings. To minimise this risk of feeling awkward Jayne proposes that together you develop a set of rules for giving and receiving feedback. These rules will focus on both respect for and confidentiality of your contributions to this research. Without your honesty in giving feedback this research will not be authentic. If at any time you feel a breach of confidentiality occurs, you will be given the contact details for Jayne's supervisor and you can arrange to communicate with her to discuss your concerns. You will also be given the contact details for her research co-supervisor who has visited Timor Leste many times. You will also be invited to contact the Director General of VET in Dili, Mr Salem Albano. VU counselling services will be made available for any of you affected by such a breach.

You may withdraw from the research at any time using the attached Withdrawal from Research form and any data related to you that has not been analysed will be deleted.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, "[Click here & type participant's name]"

of "[Click here & type participant's suburb]"

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:

An exploration of an Australian educator working with vocational education professionals from Timor Leste to develop their knowledge and practice of vocational education being conducted at Victoria University by Jayne Pitard.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by Jayne Pitard and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Individual one hour interview
- Group discussion and group reflection

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher

Jayne Pitard

Jayne.pitard@vu.edu.au.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Research Ethics and Biosafety Manager, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 or phone +61 3 9919 4148.

Revocation of Consent Form for Subjects Involved in Research

Used for participants who wish to withdraw from the project

I, ———

of (name of college or institution) ————————————————————————————————————

———

hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the research proposal described in the Plain Language Statement for the PhD thesis called:

An exploration of an Australian educator working with vocational education professionals from Timor Leste to develop their knowledge and practice of vocational education

and understand that such withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardize any treatment or my relationship with Victoria University.

Any data already collected may/may not be included in the research project.

Signature:——————————————————————————— **Date:**——————————————

RELEASE OF MATERIALS

STILL PHOTOGRAPHS ONLY

I,   [insert your
name], permit
and authorise (the) University, its staff, students, contractors and agents to:
1.   Take photographs of me, including photographs of any
live performances that I give or take part in.

2.   Collect information such as my name and quotes from
me (if I choose to give them) which, if (the) University chooses, may
accompany the photograph in:
(a)   publications and marketing materials (e.g.
brochures, course guides, staff newsletters and annual reports);

(b)   advertisements in any format or medium (e.g. in print
media, on posters and billboards, on television, radio, or on internet
websites); and

  (c)   research outputs and teaching materials.

3.   Use, publish, post on the internet, email and reproduce
such photographs and other information with or without identifying me
or naming me as the performer.

  4.   Edit, modify and change such photographs as it sees fit.

5.   Provide such photographs and other information to third
parties who may use, publish, reproduce, edit, modify and change
them in accordance to this Release.

  I acknowledge and agree that:

6.   I will not be entitled to any payment in respect of these matters.

7.   (the) University owns all rights in the images and recordings of me.

8.   (the) University may decide not to use, publish or
reproduce any of such photographs or other information.

Signature:

Name: Date:

**NOTE: The person's parent or legal guardian must sign below if the
person is under 18 years of age.**
I,   [insert your
name], being
the parent or legal guardian of the above person, consent and agree to
the terms and conditions of this release.