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The Secretary
Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee
Parliament of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT. 2600

Re: Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Dear Secretary,

I write regarding the Joint Standing Committee's Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Indonesia. My comments relate to the educational, social and cultural aspects of important people-to-people relationships that have been forged in Australia's educational arena in the past 30 years.

My own personal narrative tells of the valuable intercultural experiences possible when educational opportunities are offered to young Australians and Indonesians. With Indonesian language programs offered in secondary schools in New South Wales from the early seventies, and a pathway open to major in Indonesian studies at university level into the eighties, my options to deepen my understandings of another worldview enriched my personal and professional growth and development.

Long-standing friendships with Indonesians from Java, Sumatra and Bali particularly have engulfed my family's life. A particular cross-cultural understanding emerges from being able to share in the key events of the

lives of friends from other cultures. My family has come to understand that the needs and visions of ordinary Indonesians and Australians are the same. Language boundaries are easily overcome with the study of each other's language. My family truly feels it is constantly moving between two cultures.

My involvement with Indonesia has included liaising with Indonesian educationists, artists, writers and poets in my role as Editor of *Pelangi* magazine, a bilingual publication from the University of Southern Queensland in the (1986 to 1999), teaching primary and secondary school Indonesian in three states, training of Indonesian language teachers at universities and working with student teacher exchange programs. It is at the heart of those activities where a difference can be made to young Australians' impressions and knowledge of the riches of Indonesia. Indonesia variously touches the heart of those who learn about her, and comments received from Indonesian counterparts suggest that Indonesians are touched by Australia.

Mine is not an unusual story: many of my friends and colleagues have been involved personally and professionally with an intimate relationship with Indonesian friends and colleagues.

Much of the literature on doing business with Indonesia and indeed Asia heralds the fact that value must be placed and time must be spent building interpersonal relationships first. Once mutual understandings are established, people can then become more involved through the task at hand.

In the past five years I have undertaken some small-scale research which inherently explores the Australia-Indonesia relationship. I attach two recent articles I have written for publication.

I commend the Committee on its call for the Inquiry, and strongly support cultural and educational activities which provide opportunities to strengthen the relationship between the peoples of Australia and Indonesia. I would be pleased to contribute further and can be contacted at the address above.

Sincerely,

Dr Lesley A. Harbon

In

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Stories of raw green chillies and unlocked cupboards: the value of in-country experiences for languages¹ teachers

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Introduction

Sitting together in a restaurant exactly one year after having participated in a five-week Indonesian in-country school experience program, two young Tasmanian men described the experience most etched on their memories from having participated in the program for pre-service teachers. One told of the time he ate a little green chilli without knowing its strength and the other told of the antics of local monkeys on the roadside on the outskirts of the city of Padang in West Sumatra. The other ten Tasmanian students sitting beside them, who were also 'catching up' at the one-year reunion of the program, laughed as their memories were rekindled. One by one they emphasised their perceptions that in-country experiences highlighted cultural differences and that stories of in-country experiences can enrich the classroom delivery of a languages program. The stories swapped were positive and proved to be fond recounts of the happy experiences shared twelve months ago. Memories of negative incidents of culture shock that we know did occur, did not surface at all.

As the two lecturers involved most directly with the management and outcomes of the Australia Indonesia Rural Areas Education Scheme (AIRAES) program, we were committed firstly to the teaching and learning outcomes of the program and secondly to enhancing pre-service languages teacher education practice. We were also aware that we could track the development and location of

¹ 'Languages teaching' is the increasingly common term used to address nationally different preferences for the term LOTE (Languages other than English). Languages teaching is intended, in most cases, to encompass the idea of teaching and learning (McKay, 1998, p. 25).

these pre-service teachers' beliefs about the value of, and issues inherent in, undertaking such in-country experiences.

Below we describe how a group of Tasmanian pre-service teachers dealt with cultural differences during the school experience and rural homestay in Indonesia; and secondly we explore various views on the value of in-country experiences. In particular there is an explanation of how these pre-service teachers dealt with instances of what may be referred to as 'cultural mismatch' (Pine, 1998), how they used their language strategies to attempt to turn this mismatch around, and where they locate their values and beliefs about in-country experiences.

During the implementation and evaluation periods of the in-country program, it became clear that there was value in analysing the theoretical aspects of the exchange and being able to develop a conceptual framework for viewing cultural mismatches and pre-service teachers' coping strategies when confronted with 'difference'. We describe below our application of Pine's model (adapted from Berthoff-Peirce, cited in Pine, 1998), used to analyse the cultural mismatches occurring as our students entered, and functioned within, the other culture. Also described are our interpretations of the origins of these cultural rules as well as the strategies used by our students to 'cope', immediately and for the long term. Suggested are ways future groups of teachers can learn to 'cope' when encountering cultural mismatch by developing resources and strategies to employ their linguistic competencies/proficiencies to the full in order to reduce the confusion which accompanies cultural mismatch: the location of these values and beliefs are integral to the experience.

Background

The Australia-Indonesia Rural Areas Education Scheme (AIRAES) program was a two-phase program funded by the Australia-Indonesia Institute in Canberra in 1998, which enabled two groups of pre-service teachers from both Indonesia and Australia to travel to each other's country, experience the language and culture, and undertake a rural school experience for five weeks. The AIRAES program succeeded the AIREP program which had been designed to promote greater mutual understanding between teacher education students in Indonesia and Australia in rural communities (Hill & Thomas, 1997, p.1), and was one of a number of other programs in existence for pre-service teacher education in-country (Ferry & Konza, 1999; Hill, Thomas and Cote, 1997).

Phase 1 of the exchange, which saw eleven Indonesian pre-service teachers of English visit Australia, took place during February and March 1998. Phase 2 of the exchange, which saw eleven

Australian pre-service teachers of Indonesian visit Indonesia, took place during November and December 1998. The focus of the remainder of the description below centres on the Australians in Indonesia, seven women and four men between the ages of twenty and thirty-seven, enrolled in pre-service languages teacher education units in their education degrees, all of whom had a proficiency in Indonesian language.

Cultural differences and cultural mismatch

‘Stumbling’ on unfamiliar situations when crossing cultural boundaries, pre-service languages teachers undertaking in-country school experience programs may experience feelings of awkwardness or confusion, termed cultural mismatch (Pine, 1999), because of unfamiliarity when confronting a cultural isomorph² (Begley, 2000). With cultural mismatch, upon entering the other culture and suspecting something is different, we suspect something is different, but have no idea how to come to grips with the ‘disequilibrium’ (Pine, 1997, p. 1). Reactions to cultural mismatch can be defensiveness or withdrawal: indicators may be varied and include such behaviours as confusion, silence, unusual or awkward body language/facial expressions, verbal reactions, hilarious laughter, loss of eye contact or termination of the current action. MacNeal points to this mismatch occurring because of ‘...the cultural gulf... that allows the two cultures to say and do the same thing, but mean different things, and to say and do different things, but mean more or less the same thing...’ (MacNeal, 1995).

Cultural mismatch is actually different to culture shock, which arises from ‘shock’ felt when we are confronted with different concrete events in the ‘other’ culture where differences are strikingly great. Physiological reactions to culture shock as compared to cultural mismatch can be seen as more extreme: non-eating, crying, hysterical adverse reactions. Cultural mismatch appears in our feelings and our mixed emotions and arises from confronting an isomorph, or something which ostensibly looks ‘normal’ or ‘familiar’ on the surface.

We utilised Pine’s analytical model, adapted from the Berthoff-Peirce model (Pine, 1992, p. 665), a model for describing and analysing puzzling, naturally occurring events for our analysis of cross-cultural events. This model was not originally cross-cultural in orientation, but adapted by Pine to

² Begley (2000) explained cultural isomorph to be a social condition, a value or a posture which on the surface appears to be similar across cultures, is exactly corresponding in form and relations, but is actually different. He illustrated this with an example, ‘democracy’, which has a different reality in the Australian context than it does in other countries.

suit cross-cultural analysis. It was based on semiotics, that is, the understanding that ‘... all consciousness is sign-consciousness’ (Houser and Kloesel, 1992, p xxxvi). At the basis of this theoretical model is that to make meaning, we must have a sign, an ‘object’ and an ‘interpretant’: as Pine's model states, an event (a representation or a sign), a cultural rule (the meaning of the sign or object), and an interpretation (an interpretant - thing or person through which the meaning of the sign is interpreted) (Pine & Yafei, 1997b, p. 4). The relationship between the event and cultural rule does not function without interpretation (Pine, 1992, p. 666). Pine continues to state that ‘...personal interpretation is central to ultimate meaning-making’ (1992, p. 667), and can provide useful frameworks to understand events through such a framework. Teachers can be encouraged to value their own perceptions of events. ‘Furthermore,’ says Pine, ‘...describing and valuing these personal landscapes within a community context can evoke a dialogue in which multiple realities begin to rub against each other and illuminate individual perspectives’ (1992, p. 667). Pine’s analytical model, allowing pre-service languages teachers to value experience and illuminate perspectives, is seen in Figure 1 below.

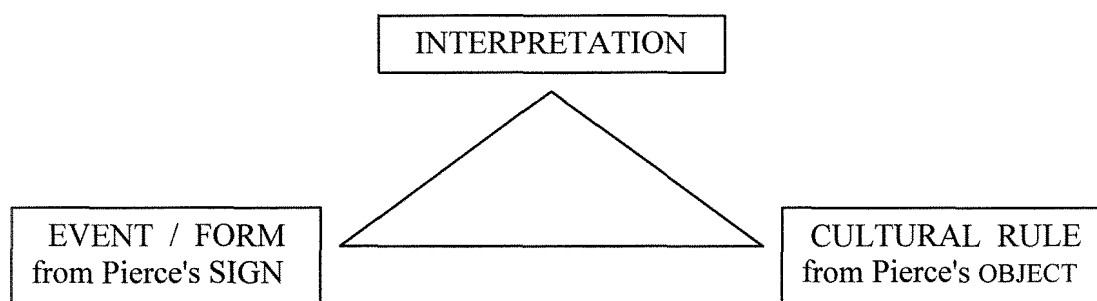


Figure 1: Pine’s analytical framework for interpretation of cultural mismatch (1993, p. 665; 1997, p. 4)
‘the sign, or meaning-making’

Pine’s was a two-stage analysis process: firstly, there is the recognition of an awkward, confusing or uncomfortable event plus the identification of where the 'strangeness' lies. Secondly, there is the employment of the Peirce model to analyse the cultural mismatch as regards the event/form, the interpretation and (analysing from both cultures), the cultural rule.

For pre-service languages teachers who have invested their time and energies to immersing themselves in a cross-cultural, in-country school experience, the chances of experiencing cultural mismatch are high: to encounter ‘difference’ is, after all, one of the prime aims of such programs and we would encourage our trainee teachers to seek such in-country experiences for just this type of experiential learning.

However, for these pre-service languages teachers to have strategies to overcome problems associated with experiencing this feeling of awkwardness or uncomfortability, the events and cultural rules are best analysed in order to shed further light on these situations and be better prepared for the future. What follows are descriptions of various events which occurred in the experiences of our pre-service teachers during Phase 2 of the AIRAES program. We believe the recognition of these events can help teachers critically reflect through their recounting of events in story form. Indeed it is not the events themselves with which we are most concerned (we refer to them thematically for convenience sake). Rather our concern is the analysis of such events show us what the pre-service languages teachers do with their own language abilities in this time of optimum learning, where contextual communication is at it's peak. What we were particularly interested in was whether and how the pre-service languages teachers used their language abilities to turn the 'awkwardness' of cultural mismatch around and whether it is possible to isolate strategies or resources for application in such situations in future. How these teachers make meaning and how and in what form they reflect on these events for future unpacking with their own classes is also of interest here.

Cultural mismatch: eight events

The pre-service languages teachers taking part in the school experience program noted the following 'awkward' and 'uncomfortable' situations in their new situation. The first three observations, thematically grouped as 'mealtime mismatches' were recounted by pre-service teachers reflecting on meal times and eating customs.

Event 1. Although in a house bustling with other university students, this pre-service teacher often found herself eating alone at the evening meal table. Not even the host mother would join her to eat. This pre-service teacher felt awkward and uncomfortable eating alone and secretly questioned whether she was so different that she should be singled out.

Event 2. After having been invited to share an evening meal in a local restaurant the pre-service languages teacher was settling down to enjoying a coffee and the possibility of singing karaoke, only to be disappointed by the fact that the hosts finished the meal and left the restaurant immediately, leaving him uncomfortably confused about whether to remain behind to finish his coffee and sing, or leave with the guests.

Event 3. This pre-service languages teacher felt confused about the fact that the family disappeared after dinner to leave her alone, with no explanation as to why their attentions to her ceased immediately after the evening meal.

Further 'cultural mismatch' occurred for two other pre-service languages teachers, causing feelings somewhat stronger than awkwardness, perhaps almost a feeling of anger. For the purposes of this study we have termed these 'personal possessions/personal space mismatches'.

Event 4: One of the pre-service teachers asked a colleague in her staff room to process a film. The next morning she was horrified to find the staff members looking through her processed photos, having spread them from one side of the staffroom to the other, without her permission.

Event 5: A pre-service teacher returned home one day only to find that her cupboard, which she had inadvertently left unlocked, had been opened. She found evidence of someone rummaging through her private papers and belongings. Although no items had been stolen, she knew everything had been touched and felt violated and confused as to what to do.

The third set of observations occurred for our pre-service languages teachers around the theme of personal friendship relationships, and we have termed these 'relationship mismatches'.

Event 6: For many weeks this pre-service teacher had observed the custom of males holding hands or hugging shoulders to outwardly express their close (heterosexual) friendship, but was taken aback and embarrassed when the offer was made to hold his hand and hug shoulders with his new Indonesian friends.

Event 7: As this pre-service teacher became acquainted with the family routines, she felt comfortable sitting down after school with the children and servant (female) and mother to watch television. She was taken aback when the close proximity of sitting positions soon became 'touching, stroking of hands and knees'.

Event 8: After sitting down with her host family for the first time, the pre-service teacher directed a question to the elder daughter regarding existence of a boyfriend. This was greeted by hilarious laughter from the parents and especially from the daughter herself. The pre-service teacher felt severely embarrassed by this reaction to a seemingly innocent question.

The meaning of events

The Pine framework discussed earlier proves useful for interpreting how cultural mismatch, occurring when individuals meet cultural isomorphs, can provide a framework for the 'whole' situation. The interlocking parts of the whole situation: the events, the cultural rules and the interpretations are interpreted differently across two cultures.

The pre-service teachers in events 1, 2 and 3 were all expecting that the meal would be a time for family sharing/togetherness/camaraderie as it is in their own Australian culture. All the indicators were present in the environment to lead them to believe it would be so: that is, fine food served, plenty of people nearby, feelings of relaxation towards the end of the day. However, after telling the story and analysing the two cultures' interpretations of these events, the program participants realised that the Australian cultural rule is that we seek company at mealtimes, but the Indonesian culture seeks personal space and time alone to focus solely on the task of eating without disruption.

The pre-service teacher in event no. 4 had simply intended to have a friend process her film. She was angered when the next morning the staff were looking at her photos, as she felt this was a clear violation of her rights to remain in charge of who has access to her property. In event no. 5, the angered pre-service teacher had also had her property accessed without her permission. In Australia the custom is never to open/access the property of another person without permission. The Indonesian cultural rule is that it is allowable to access another person's property if it is not locked away.

In events nos. 6, 7 and 8, the pre-service teachers presumed that the 'getting to know you' context when first meeting friends and family members would necessitate the same behaviours regarding significant people, friends and family as it would in the Australian context. This, however, was not the case as in Indonesia: after finally sharing their stories with staff, the program participants found that feelings of friendship and closeness to guests can be overtly shown by touching.

Language to 'cope'

The pre-service languages teachers who had reported experiencing cultural mismatch during or surrounding meal times reported that the strategies they used to 'cope' with their confused feelings were firstly to remain very quiet and seek out any visible indicators as to what should be their next

course of action. Even though they had the language proficiency in the target language to do so, none sought the immediate opinion of either the host or friends. At the spur of the moment they decided to internalise their feelings, not wanting to take any further action in case that made the situation worse. Later, however, these pre-service teachers reported 'comparing notes' with friends in their first language, if only to compare whether the same was occurring for them as well and to find out what action should be taken, if any.

The pre-service teachers reported experiencing cultural mismatch when someone had accessed their personal belongings without permission. They also reported that, against the conflicting feelings of anger which welled up inside them, they remained quiet and only during the evaluation period at the completion of the program did they share this information, and then only with the program coordinator. Like the mealtime mismatches, none of the pre-service teachers utilised the language abilities they possessed. Rather, they sought to remain outwardly calm and quiet for fear of the consequences which may have been worse should they have made a fuss.

The third group of students who reported experiencing cultural mismatch when 'closeness' was translated as close touching, also used the initial strategy of remaining quiet. This was to hide their embarrassment as much as anything. Neither of those students attempted to pull away from the touch/hand-holding for fear of offending. The pre-service teacher who caused the hilarity with her question regarding the boyfriend, reported joining in the hilarious laughter as well, if only to hide her embarrassment and wanting to join in with whatever was the joke. None of these pre-service teachers sought to use their target language in requesting an explanation of the situation from the host, or the opinions of their colleagues.

With 'one-off' 'personal property/personal space mismatches', such as the photo-processing and the unlocked cupboard, the students did not seek to share these events in the public arena, as the decision was taken that they could remain 'in control' by not allowing such events to re-occur. These pre-service teachers were focussing the control of the situation on themselves.

It appears that with the continual 'daily' events, such as the 'mealtime mismatches', the students delayed using the strategy of sharing their stories with friends in order to make some sense of the mismatch. The mismatch was likely to have continued because of the 'routine' nature of daily meals. The pre-service teachers sought the solace of friends, finding they did not have control over events at subsequent meal times.

However, with the 'relationship mismatches', the pre-service teachers did not seek to share their cultural mismatch with staff or friends and these events were also in danger of re-occurring, making solutions beyond their control. It appears that the closeness in the 'touching' nature of the events made the situations too indescribable for these pre-service teachers who internalised all feelings in order to let time and space intercede before they could make meaning from the events.

The three groups of events above show that the pre-service languages teachers face the awkward events in the following ways: they either remain quiet, discuss in English with friends a short time afterward, report to the lecturer much later, or purely accept things as they are - none utilised the language facility they all possessed.

These were not instances of culture shock. Culture shock was expected, encountered, recognised and dealt with in other ways. The pre-service languages teachers had read widely about culture shock in order to prepare for their in-country experience. On the contrary, the cultural mismatch events were situations where the pre-service teachers had no idea what was wrong or barely knew that there was a problem at all.

Remaining quiet while waiting for others to act is a dominant reaction by the pre-service teachers. They remained quiet as they didn't know what other's reactions would be if they reacted first. Should the pre-service teacher who observed her photos being shared around the staffroom have shouted out, or ruthlessly grabbed at her possessions, her anger and coarse actions may have caused further confusion on all sides. These pre-service teachers were 'within' the other culture. Remaining quiet, still feeling they were operating 'within' their own culture, was not clarifying the situation.

Although their inner feelings were discontentment and confusion, the program participants dared not take concrete action because that may cause another far worse situation. Actually if they had decided to ask for clarification from their Indonesian counterparts, utilising the language skills they possessed, perhaps they would have received a clear explanation to be able to understand the customs of the people around them. Should the pre-service student who caused the hilarity when asking about the boyfriend have stopped her hosts and asked 'What's wrong, why are you laughing?', she may have been given a very clear explanation.

Languages teachers 'immersed' in in-country cultural experiences must appreciate that 'asking' is wise if they are to avoid interpersonal misunderstandings. Asking for clarification after telling the story of the events, by seeking clarification and questioning in the target language, and also adding

one's own explanation in the target language, both sides could clarify their respective positions based on their interpretation of the event, because according to Peirce '...sign often lends itself to multiple interpretations,... one person's interpretation of a sign may be quite different from another person's' (Pine & Yafei, 1997b).

For the pre-service teacher, whose feelings were constantly suppressed in such events, what was initially 'different' may snowball and eventually seem shockingly different. But if they should choose to utilise their language facility to tell the story, asking questions and explaining their views on the matter, both sides may eventually see each other's point of view. Should the pre-service teacher who ate alone night after night have simply asked the host parent 'Why don't you eat with me?', she may have had the situation clarified on the spot and not have had to endure many a lonely mealtime. After all, she had the language facility to do this.

Remaining quiet can add to the stress of the situation. In leaving the problem at a hidden/suppressed level, or somehow stifled in this way, there is more chance of the individual avoiding any further interpersonal contact for fear of causing more problems. One strategy that was not utilised was the utilisation of the target language to firstly recount the story, secondly to provide an explanation from the one cultural viewpoint and thirdly to request an explanation from the other cultural viewpoint.

The second dominant reaction was to share these feelings with friends in English. Program participants who did share their stories, shared with close friends to be able to release some feelings of tenseness. This kind of action was only undertaken after experiencing the awkward/uncomfortable event. Compared with the action above of remaining silent, sharing with friends seems a wiser action although did not allow them to gain fullest insight as may occur if an explanation is given in the target language.

Recognising and dealing with cultural mismatch

The special and focussed nature of a school experience cross-cultural exchange, which was surrounded by a wealth of information and documentation about cultural differences and culture shock, prepared this group of pre-service languages teachers for differences. What was not expected was the 'unexpected/out of control' nature of the cultural mismatch events which occurred. These events caused the pre-service languages teachers to experience a type of learning which they

acknowledge they sought in applying to be a participant in the program: especially to take part in language learning which can only occur in the in-country context, full of authentic experiences.

The environment in which we grow up shapes the ways by which we interpret events. Languages teachers should never be afraid to face new experiences in the target culture, especially if there is a chance to ask for clarification of any underlying cultural meanings. How to encourage languages teachers to ask immediate questions in the target language is significant here. It is perhaps a task for the orientation period in programs such as AIRAES, when the group first enters the culture. Open, explicit telling of stories and dialogue on related matters may help participants to recognise and deal with cultural mismatch.

Developing cultural knowledge in an 'in-country' period

It is a common assumption that to be a 'good' languages teacher, we must have a certain amount of cultural knowledge and skills in our teaching repertoire to impart to students in our languages classrooms. The question remains as to how (by developing which strategies and resources) the teacher gains this knowledge. Gaining insight into what is considered best practice and the role of cultural knowledge in a teacher's professional development in the pre-service period is explored here.

Best practice for languages teachers has been discussed most recently in the literature, such as in the work of Wylie and Ingram (1995) in Australia, and the research of Brosh (1996) in Israel. Wylie and Ingram (1995) state that the following are necessary attributes for a languages teacher: competence in professional knowledge (including knowledge of the language, the socio-cultural aspects of the target culture, knowledge of language teaching methodology), skills (planning of programs, behaviour management, assessment techniques) and attitudes (showing respect for students, valuing differences, willingness to be responsible for own professional development). Data from Brosh's (1996) survey of 200 languages teachers highlighted the following as important: the teacher's command of the target language, the teacher's ability to organise, explain, clarify, arouse, sustain and motivate. As well, when analysing 409 questionnaires from high school languages students, Brosh found that cultural proficiency was rated as extremely important by learners when they responded to which features they liked in their foreign languages teachers.

The assumption that knowledge of a language can provide insight into a culture, in turn providing insight into the ways of thinking of a people, has been much researched. It is agreed that there is a need to include the study of culture in the languages classroom, particularly as knowledge of cultural conventions can assist in the process of communication with people from different cultural backgrounds (Triandis, 1972; Genesee, 1995; Kramsch et al., 1996 cited in Griffiths, 1998, p. 17). Triandis (1972, p. 346) states that ‘...intercultural interaction can be extremely easy for those who know the subjective culture of the other cultural group and have the proper skills for emitting the proper behaviours in each social situation...’. As well, language in context can provide communication which is ‘meaningful and significant’ (Genesee, 1995).

Pre-service languages teacher education programs can be structured to encourage future languages teachers to develop skills, proficiencies and competencies in the target language, as well as a motivation to develop their knowledge of the target culture: this we would consider ‘best’ practice. This can include providing pre-service languages teachers with the opportunity to experience the target culture in an in-country program, allowing them ‘experiential’ learning in the authentic context and opportunities for telling stories which can explain events, a type of learning which cannot easily be modelled in the classroom.

The pre-service teacher training period is the time and place to begin to sow the seeds of inquiry and thinking for future educational imperatives and to plan for ‘special’ kinds of teachers (LoBianco, 1998). Melnick suggests that ‘...more knowledge and radically different skills for teachers...’ will be needed in future. Teachers must be prepared for ‘...languages, cultures, exceptionalities, learning styles, talents and intelligences, therefore requiring a rich variety of teaching strategies’ (Darling-Hammond et al., in Melnick and Zeichner, 1998, p. 88). The focus on making connections between the students we teach in K-12 classrooms and people around the world (Tyson et al, 1997, p. 73) and telling stories about events in other cultures will be increasingly important. For otherwise, how else will the next generations learn about intercultural dynamics and intercultural communication (Pine, 1998, p. 1)?

The common assumption is that within pre-service languages teacher programs, which focus on creating these new special kind of teachers, there is a necessity to provide enriching school experience sessions: classroom experiences which are critical in enabling these new teachers to link theory to practice as well as develop initial teaching competencies. The purpose of the school experience is to provide prospective teachers with classroom experience practice in a supportive environment, allowing gradual assimilation of responsibilities. If it is this field experience/school

experience which becomes an agreed meaningful part of pre-service languages teacher preparation, ‘...alternative enriching ways of preparing teachers for their multiple roles and teaching contextual complexities of life in schools and for careers as inquiring professionals...’ (Knowles and Cole, 1996, p. 648) should be identified and developed: for languages teachers, these experiences are valuable when located in-country.

Languages teachers need to gain first-hand experience in the culture where their target language is spoken. Grant and Secada (in Wiest, 1998, p. 358ff.), reviewing the research on preparing teachers for diverse learners, conclude that ‘...experiences with representations from diverse populations...’ are the best and most worthwhile field experiences. In providing school experiences which focus on expanding the students outlooks, Wiest found that ‘...short, more informal, intensive cultural immersion experience...’ can strongly influence pre-service teachers and have far-reaching effects. With such experiences, their later teaching may well be affected in a positive way, causing them to develop programs which will in turn improve their students’ understanding of diversity through multicultural education immersion programs.

According to Stackowski, student teachers must spend time in the local community ‘outside school doors’ to be fully experiencing the authentic context of the school experience. It is not enough for teachers to ‘imagine’ how the authentic context might be. In the Northern Arizona Navajo Indian program, student teachers were immersed in the Navajo culture and this heightened their awareness of cross-cultural and linguistic barriers to teaching and learning (Minner, 1995). Outcomes of the Navajo experience were that the pre-service teachers were more culturally sensitive and better informed educators (Stackowski, 1998, p.162).

For our students in classrooms to be able to understand, interact with, and learn from people different from themselves, they must develop knowledge that our worldviews are not always the same as others, and cross-cultural awareness is how ideas can be viewed by others. The teachers who facilitate the learning of these ideas must have been exposed to such data themselves. In-country school experience programs (such as the one which will be described below) target such learning (Tyson et al, 1997, p.73). The value of in-country school experiences for cross-cultural understanding is, as Pine says, that teachers can firstly, ‘...clarify situations by identifying cultural foundations of situations’, secondly, work towards understandings of students’ puzzling behaviours, and thirdly, try to understand what they represent and the foundation from which they come’ (Pine, 1999, p.?). As well, there can be an ‘...enhanced ability to look at a situation from another’s perspective...’ acquiring an increased sympathy for feelings people experience when outside of their

more dominant culture (Wiest). Sleeter (in Wiest, 1995, pp. 358ff) found her students began to confront their own fears, misconceptions and ignorance after spending some time in another socio-cultural group. Despite their uneasiness in adopting a minority role in an unfamiliar culture, those who have participated in immersion programs endorse them for removing biases.

Every nation takes pride in its culture - no one nation is free from ethnocentric attitudes. All pre-service languages teachers evaluated the AIRAES program as being extremely valuable for them personally and professionally in their early teaching careers as future foreign language teachers as they prepare to face their ethnocentricity and help their students face cultural differences. They also perceived that the value of the in-country program is now located in their beliefs, specifically within the stories they tell and anecdotes they pass on in class to students.

‘Critical reflection on firsthand experience is crucial for learning to mesh behaviour and beliefs to achieve the important goal of acting with understanding’ (Wiest, 1998, pp.358 ff). As program coordinators involved with implementing these cross-cultural teacher exchanges on a semi-regular basis, we would highly recommend the ‘critical reflection’ strategies adopted by the AIRAES pre-service teachers as being suitable to suit the cross-cultural/mutual understanding aspects of the in-country program.

Pre-service languages teachers undertaking an in-country school experience should:

- read as widely as possible about homestays and field placements in Indonesian culture. (The findings of a study by Crealock, Derwing and Gibson (1999) confirm a 'dearth of information' (p. 56) available on living with a host family.);
- recognise that cultural isomorphs, or 'signs' exist, and that, for example, ‘mealtime’, ‘friendship’ and ‘personal possession/personal space’ isomorphs (and the myriad of others!) may have other meanings in other cultures;
- recognise cultural mismatch and the fact that that cultural mismatch will occur at the most inconvenient and unexpected times and recognise that these are very valuable experiential learning opportunities which are not able to be taught or simulated or gained in the classroom;
- remain calm and quiet initially when dealing with mismatch (unless dangerous or of extremely serious nature) and recognise that the event may well be cultural mismatch;
- ask a series of questions: What sign is the individual using, that is, what is the event that is causing the problem? What is the cultural rule for that sign/event in both cultures? and What is the interpretation held in the person's mind and one's own mind? (Pine, 1992, p. 670);

- ascertain, after the event, whether there is an element of 'control' in the situation. If, indeed, the individual is in a position to take control and not allow the event to reoccur as before, that action should be taken and no mention needs be made to others. If the individual is in no position to take control in routine situations, dialogue should begin amongst 'significant others' **in the target language**, avoiding possible offence or loss of face to the hosts. Asking for clarification in the target language is the key, but also providing an explanation as to why the confusion has occurred in the first place from the home culture;
- make explicit the knowledge and cultural awareness gained during the in-country experience within stories: sharing stories with others in both cultures may further clarify meaning.

We agree with Talburt and Stewart when they state, '...The different linguistic and cultural lessons and coping strategies that students learn from how members of the host culture perceive and treat them... should form an integral part of the formal on-site curriculum' (1999, p. 173) and as program leaders we intend to make this explicit in future programs. Languages teachers experiencing the target language and culture in an in-country program can feel satisfied that they are immersed sufficiently in the local context when experiencing cultural mismatch.

Interestingly, no 'mismatch' stories reappeared one year later as the group remembered their experiences in Padang. Once explained, the mismatches seem to be 'filed' in pre-service languages teachers' knowledge schema for reference at a later date. Stories of unlocked cupboards and lonely mealtimes may or may not appear alongside stories of raw green chillies and monkey antics in the classroom teaching repertoire of these languages teachers at a later date.

Languages teachers can be assured that when critically reflecting at a later point in time that they will be able to look back on the events and track what new languages skills and cultural knowledge have opened up to them after an in-country experience. The knowledge and teaching competencies able to be gained from an in-country experience such as the AIRAES program described above are many and rich. For the sake of understanding that cultural mismatch will unexpectedly occur, it is easy to put these easily implemented strategies into place, knowing that time and space will be needed before critical reflection can occur and meaning can be made from the event.

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The art of unpacking: Using flexible delivery materials
for teachers preparing to learn in overseas contexts

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Abstract

Teachers with direct experiences of other education systems are valuable resources and it is increasingly common for pre- and in-service teacher education programs to provide overseas learning experiences for students (Hill, Thomas & Cote, 1997). When involved in an overseas school experience or language and culture study, participating teachers are able to compare curriculum and pedagogical issues. Their beliefs on teaching and learning and the influence of cultural context can and do impact on curriculum implementation.

This comparison can adequately be undertaken by critical reflection processes: teachers reflecting on their classroom experiences; exploring teaching and learning practices, to eventually be able to change or reframe their understandings of why they do what they do (Brookfield, 1995). Our challenge was how best to maximise such a learning experience for both undergraduate and post-graduate teachers undertaking the in-country school experience in West Sumatra during January 2001.

In conjunction with a decision to provide overseas offerings in undergraduate and post-graduate programs in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania, the researchers developed and implemented a CD-ROM resource package for students involved in the Indonesian in-country units of study. This package, comprising a pre-departure learning package of guided readings and web-based interaction, became a learning scaffold for the students and allowed them to maximise the in-country experience as well as organise their reflective practices.

Evaluation of the planning and design stages of the project is reported, as well as issues arising from the pilot implementation of the package.

Introduction

This paper describes processes the researchers/designers experienced in order to produce an educational CD-ROM package for students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania. It also describes how the students were able to utilise the product, the Teach_Indo CD-ROM, for their own learning in a study-abroad educational program.

The researchers utilise the metaphor of packing and unpacking a suitcase for a journey and trace how they, the researchers, and their students, were able to pack and unpack their knowledge, understandings and beliefs to compare and contrast Australian and Indonesian education. Unpacking is described as an “art”. In fact, as with teaching, there are aspects of science and art. The science in this instance was the technical aspects of developing the CD-ROM and the Art the pedagogical knowledge of knowing what to put in, in what sequence and what to leave out.

Why Unpacking? Just as the designers and their students were physically preparing for travel by packing, repacking and unpacking the contents of a suitcase necessary for travel to Indonesia, the designers also had to unpack their own beliefs about teaching and learning, their understandings of the advantages and disadvantages of this technological medium and a willingness to accept that old ways of teaching and learning could be changed in this new mode of delivery. Initially the process involved unpacking our pedagogical beliefs and intents, debating and prioritising those beliefs and intents necessary and appropriate for this journey into a new way of teaching and learning. The users of the package were required to unpack many of their beliefs and re-assess these in the light of a different culture with a very different world view. And it all came in a new medium or “suitcase” – a CD-ROM.

Rationale and background context: The value of in-country learning

In order to encourage an international perspective our Faculty offers undergraduate and post-graduate students an opportunity to enrol in several education units in an off-shore program at the State University of Padang, West Sumatra. This “in-country” program during the summer school period has been designed for general primary and secondary teachers upgrading their qualifications, and also specifically for foreign language or social studies teachers currently teaching in primary or secondary schools throughout Australia.

Following the model of a similar successful *Teach in Indonesia* program in December 1998 (Atmazaki & Harbon, 1999), the program includes:

- authentic in-country classroom experience;
- language classes (beginners/intermediate/advanced);
- homestay with local families;
- opportunities for field work;
- seminars on educational, cultural, language, religious and arts themes.

Three aspects informed the design and construction of this program: the value of in-country learning experiences, the role of reflection in teaching and learning in a context of change, and a flexible new educational teaching and learning tool: a CD-ROM.

Teachers with direct experiences of other education systems are a sought-after commodity in the Australian education system. All teachers, and especially those teachers of foreign language and social studies in Australian schools, should be provided with opportunities to contribute to, and learn from, other school systems. Lo Bianco (1998, p. 1) points to a growing need for “special kinds of teachers” for educational needs in the future. Teachers will need different skills and must be prepared for “languages, cultures, exceptionalities, learning styles, talents and intelligences”, therefore requiring a wide diversity of teaching strategies, some of which may be accessed through education systems other than our own (Darling-Hammond et al., as cited in Melnick & Zeichner, 1998, p. 88).

Opportunities for international study visits can enable teachers to develop personally and professionally, experience authentic language used in context, carry out research, share information with a network of other participants and build better classroom practice upon return to Australia. In-country experiences can ensure that teachers gain useful insights for their own teaching practice in areas where development will have most impact. These in-country experiences set up situations for participant teachers to observe practice different to their own, achieving an “expanded awareness of their own practice” as a result (Lamb, 1995, p. 79). From the expanded awareness they gain overseas, teachers can return home and reflect, to “...determine the specific areas of their teaching that they wish to develop” (Lamb, 1995, p. 79).

Pre-service and in-service teacher education curricula developed in future will need to focus on making connections between the students in K-12 classrooms and people around the world (Tyson, Benton, Christenson, Golloh & Mamourne-Traoure, 1997, p. 73). Teachers in classrooms who facilitate these global connections for their students will need to have been exposed to such cross-cultural connections themselves. School experience periods within pre- and in-service courses can be one way to provide classroom experiences which are critical in enabling these teachers to link theory to practice. According to research (Grant & Secada, as cited in Wiest, 1998, p. 358) “experiences with representations from diverse populations” are the best and most worthwhile field experiences. In providing school experiences that focus on expanding the students’ outlooks, Wiest (1998) and Stackowski (1998) found that “short, more informal, intensive cultural immersion experience” can strongly influence pre-service teachers and have far-reaching effects, allowing them to gain a cultural competence (Ryan, 1998, p. 151).

The University of Tasmania is one of several universities in Australia that provides overseas practicum experiences for students (Booth, 1997; Ferry, 1999; McFarlane, 1997) and the successful outcomes for students have been variously reported (Hill, Thomas & Cote, 1997). The Indonesian “in-country” experience at the centre of this

project can provide “alternative enriching ways of preparing teachers for their multiple roles and teaching contextual complexities of life in schools and for careers as inquiring professionals” (Knowles & Cole, 1996, p. 648). More than ever before, due to increased global mobility, future teachers for new times will need to be planning for new challenges in education, and for their own and their students’ reflective learning.

The Role of Reflection on Teaching and Learning

In-country field experiences target such learning (Tyson et al., 1997, p. 73) yet must involve change. Significant change involves a dynamic relationship between the four big “M”s: materials; methods; morals; and, mortals (Fullan, 1991). Teachers, the curriculum they plan, the ways they teach and the materials they use, will undergo substantial change to develop according to changes in the new global context of the 21st Century.

Research has shown that by living and reflecting on an educational experience, the opportunity for understanding and internalising that learning into changing teaching practices are increased (Brookfield, 1995; Dewey, 1933; Russell & Munby, 1991). Brookfield (1995) suggests that through reflection and its linkage to theory, we, as teachers, gain a language to name our practice. Reflection may be the process of teachers responding to their experiences, exploring their learning and teaching practices, changing or reframing their understandings of why they do what they do to better understand the reasons for those changes in practice (Brookfield, 1995).

Those entering the teaching profession bring with them long-held and firmly-rooted beliefs about what a teacher does, how classrooms and schools “should” operate and how teachers and learners should behave. Experienced teachers have both the benefit and hindrance of experience. They are able to draw on their experience to illuminate current problems and have the ability and confidence to reframe their understandings (Russell & Munby, 1991). In order to move to even more elaborate views of practice, teachers need to continue the scrutiny and reflective judgement of their own practices (Russell & Munby, 1991, p. 195). Dewey suggests one of the many benefits of being open-minded in reflecting on practice include teachers who are “hospitable” to new themes, and who are able to move out of the rut (Dewey, 1933, p. 52).

It is often the case that teachers must step out into another context for a period, to be able to look back and reflect on their own practice in order to make sense of what they see. This was the intention of the Indonesian in-country experience, the heart of the project. Teachers would live and operate in another context, and be provided with opportunities to critically evaluate their experiences (Byram, 1997, p. 101).

Participants in the Indonesian in-country program were likely to experience culture shock or cultural mismatch in personal and professional situations, at the homestays and in schools, as was described in the research of Atmazaki & Harbon (1999). Critical incidents, or “vividly remembered events” (Brookfield, 1990, as cited in Thiel, 1999) will affect the participants personally and professionally. The challenge for beginning and experienced teachers and their teacher educators, is to confront their current knowledge,

practice and beliefs about teaching and how those practices and beliefs were acquired and evaluated in the first place (LaBoskey, 1994). The aim is to produce truly reflective practitioners.

Delivery Mode

Teachers enrolling in these Indonesian in-country units are no longer expecting face-to-face classroom situations of the 1980s. They are entering new times, with the inherent pragmatics and constraints of contemporary mass tertiary education. There are larger enrolment numbers, wider ability ranges, and a diversity amongst mature and part time students for whom “real” time access is rarely convenient (Ryan, 1994). With the high costs of the physical infrastructure and staff to cope with the new context, the traditional notion of the “class” has had to be re-thought. The notion of the “class” has been coupled with changing beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning; that is, a de-emphasis of the role of “teaching” as an expert activity, and the emerging emphasis on student “learning” as an active construction of reflection on experience and knowledge.

Academic staff everywhere, delivering “new” programs to teachers who are preparing to teach in more global contexts, need to explore alternative modes of teaching and course delivery that differ from the traditional notions of the “class”. With these factors in mind, and with the acceptance and enthusiasm for “technology” in every aspect of today’s society as an integral part of the educational experience of students (Ryan, 1994), it is becoming more and more accepted that the use of computers provides a “space” for learning not limited by time or geography in “conventional” teacher education university courses.

Our aim was to engage learners “in mindful learning” (Jonassen, 1996, p. 259). The use of a CD-ROM can enhance the self-regulating aspects of pre- and in-service teachers’ tasks. They are learners who “determine their goals for learning, plan for learning, prepare themselves to learn, engage in learning activities, monitor what and how they best learn, regulate the learning activities in light of that monitoring, and maintain motivation and a purpose for learning” (Jonassen, 1996, p. 259-60).

The resources made available on the CD-ROM and in hard-copy were designed to provide guided experiences upon which the participants in the in-country program could begin to critically reflect. The areas for this reflection included anticipated language, educational and cultural differences; possible cross-cultural incidents which could lead to misunderstandings; identification of personal beliefs about language learning strategies; and a structure to guide the self-reflection process which would assist in documenting critical incidents when in-country, to see value in them, to revisit them and to analyse the assumptions underlying those events (Thiel, 1999).

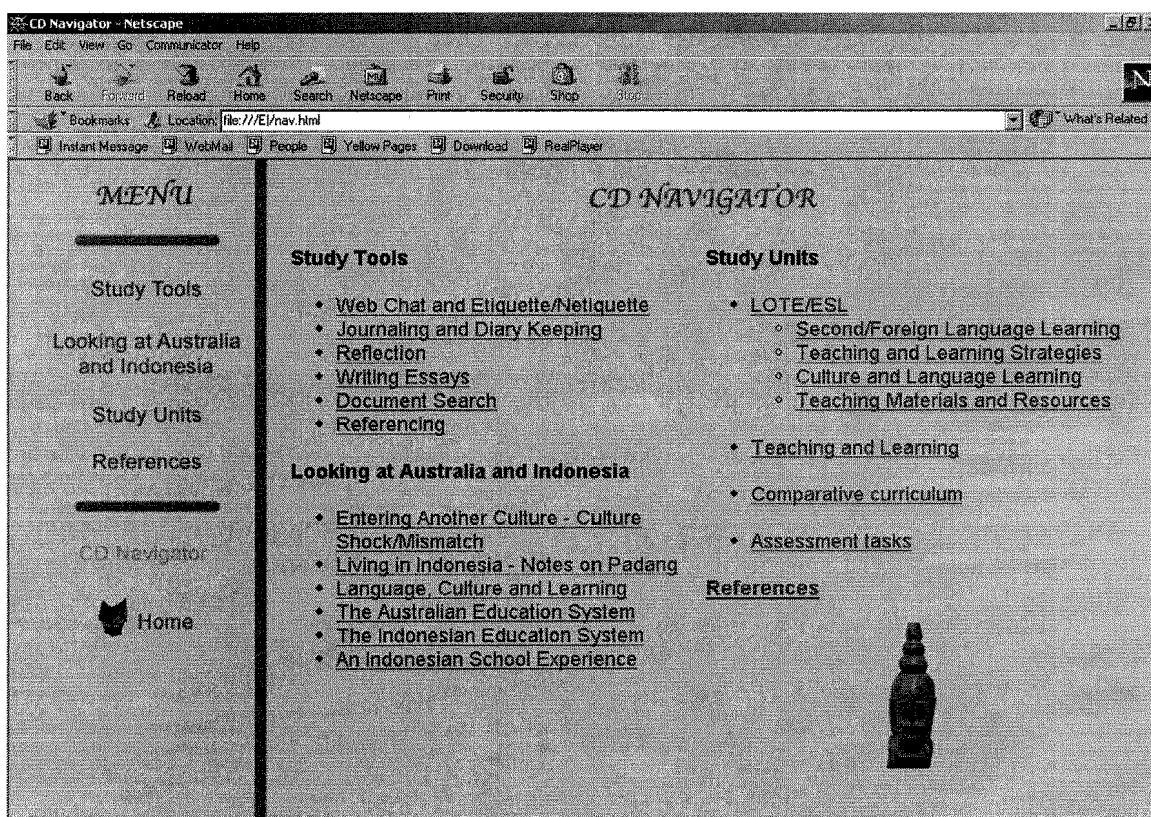
The process of CD-ROM development: The building of the suitcase

The use of purely print-based materials was rejected. The developers prioritised the need for flexibility in content and process. By this we mean that a CDROM format, unlike a

print-based format, allows students to move around the material quickly via the hyperlinks in a non-linear fashion. The artefact itself, the CDROM, required students to unpack their beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning. For example, the students' prior pedagogical beliefs may have been based on teacher-centredness, but the CDROM required them to reflect and choose their own path of learning, that is, students assuming the responsibility of what and when to learn.

This CDROM format afforded the developers and the learners to experience the images, the sound and the colour, albeit vicariously, of the target culture. Consequently this allows the learners to engage with the material in the various sections of the CDROM, and conduct a "quasi" reflective dialogue between their own cultural and pedagogical thinking and those of the target culture.

The first steps were to identify three key areas where students would want information for their in-country study program. The researchers noted these areas for which they believed students would need particular preparation: how to use the CD-ROM and manage this flexible learning environment, generic information on Indonesia and the formal unit requirements. Three sections of the CD-ROM were designed to include immediate information about those aspects and, in particular, links to websites which would meet and assist students' individual personal learning needs. These areas were (1) Study Tools, (2) Looking at Australia and Indonesia and (3) Study Units. Each section included selected readings, links to websites and, in some cases, audio recordings or video footage.



a. Study Tools

This section of the CD-ROM focussed on the “survival” study skills necessary to succeed in this electronic environment and in university study: Web Chat and Etiquette/Netiquette, Journaling and Diary Keeping, Reflection, Writing Essays, Document Search and Referencing. Many of the students were returning to study and lacked the current necessary skills to succeed in an environment which has clear expectations in terms of academic success. These sites and resources provide a readily available “tutor”.

b. Looking at Australia and Indonesia

The second section of the CD-ROM provided material for students to focus on “survival” skills necessary to gain the maximum benefit from the in-country experience. Some sites linked to specific Indonesian web-pages, such as the daily West Sumatran newspaper; a currency-converter site; sites on food and daily living information; sites for language learning; the Indonesian government education site; a site on the Australian education system. A valuable link was also added to the video clip of the previous Indonesian school experience.

The researchers were aware that students’ needs are predictable as regards their reaction to being in another culture. Overseas travel provides experiences to cause unease and other aspects which can cause culture shock. Thus the need to include general readings on issues of culture shock and mismatch and cross-cultural communication in this second section.

c. Study Units

The final section provided guidelines and introductory resources for the study units. The two teachers introduced themselves on introductory pages and provided overviews, visions and expectations for the focus of their programs.

Construction issues

Having decided on what to pack, decisions were made on how to construct the suitcase, that is, the framework of the CD-ROM, including colour and design features. The first decision was to utilise this “virtual” medium in ways which tapped into its potential, ie. flexibility and the opportunity to import non-text based multimedia such as video. The researchers were convinced that the answer to their flexible learning tool provision was not to produce a book on disc. Hence some readings were scanned and provided on the CD-ROM as “tasters”. The links to other web-sites and electronic journals were viewed as far more important and much better suited to the medium.

The introduction page takes the learner immediately into a predominance of use of maroon and gold, significant colours in the world of the Minangkabau culture of West Sumatra. These colours and the image of a section of *songket* weaving was repeated on the disc labels, on the hard case covers and on the print based reading booklets to become the “trademark” of the Teach Indo program. This deliberate choice aimed to introduce the learners to some of the underlying culture of this province of Indonesia.

The Home icon is a scanned image of a traditional Minangkabau house featuring the buffalo-horn shaped roof line. The icons were chosen to repeat the cultural or contextual themes of the key areas, sections or pages wherever possible. The Study Skills section includes icons and images of computers, books and pens. The second section included images of a closed suitcase for Entering Another Culture which is slowly opened as you progress through the pages.

The development of a learning tool such as a CD-ROM cannot be solely the product of the designers. We had to unpack our own skills, identify the shortfalls, learn new ways of understanding, interpreting and communicating in a new medium and utilise the skills of web page designers and technical staff to assist in the production of a polished and professional outcome. There was much unpacking by the team of writers and CD-ROM developers as all involved learned to understand and appreciate each other’s skills and knowledge and view of teaching and learning.

Trialling and student use

Prior to producing multiple copies of the CD-ROM, it was trialed by academic colleagues who had no knowledge of the content or processes used to develop the resource. The CD-ROMs and booklets were then distributed to the students one month prior to their departure for Padang. The student cohort included beginner undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as experienced primary and secondary teachers in Tasmania.

Each study unit required students to utilise and navigate through all sections of the CD-ROM to record pre-departure e-mail reflections after reacting to the readings and materials. This became the first of three assessment tasks in the units. Individual students could choose to focus on areas of personal interest according to their pre-departure needs.

Data collection methods

Data were gathered on students’ perceptions of the value of the CD-ROM and its contents. A first questionnaire was developed to canvas students’ perceptions of the overseas study program in general. A second questionnaire evaluated specifically the strengths and weaknesses of the CD-ROM content and design.

For the first questionnaire, general reflections were sought on the value of the program to the learners. Students commented on practical issues such as budgeting/money-changing,

personal needs (medical, food and clothing) and reactions to their homestay. The academic program, the school experience and study issues were then “unpacked” in detail, students reacting to structure, content and process.

A “stepped” discussion process allowed these data to be gathered. This involved private writing, shared discussion between participants, with lecturers joining in the final discussion for clarification of issues.

The second questionnaire was a written document, with participants giving demographic information, exploring their previous experience using CD-ROMs prior to this experience. Participants then indicated (ratings from 1 to 5 in perceived order of importance) their reaction to the structure and content of the CD-ROM, the value of web-links for sourcing general and specific information on Indonesia, reactions to academic study units and final comments (in open-ended response items) to issues that challenged them and surprised them as regards the CD-ROM learning package.

These questionnaires were distributed upon arrival in Indonesia, requiring completion in Padang prior to departure. The researchers’ interests were on the CD-ROM artefact rather than on the changes such a tool may have engendered in the learners.

Data analysis involved two processes. The rated items were tallied for frequency counts. The open-ended responses were thematically coded. We identified key themes, later verifying these themes with the group in a mind-mapping exercise using a whiteboard at the final seminar.

Outcomes, use and value to students

One of the anticipated outcomes of the development of this pre-departure learning package was that it would help students to prepare for their in-country experience. All participants were encouraged to access CD-ROM or web-based software to upgrade their Indonesian language proficiency. Learner autonomy and self-pacing of such virtual language learning software became an issue as was reported in a previous study (Harbon, 2000). The students did find that it assisted in their gathering of pre-departure information on the practical issues such as money, language and education structures in Indonesia. On arrival in Padang some of the sights for example the typical roof lines of the home icon and even faces of individuals from the video clips were already familiar. A sense that “I know where I am” was already in place. It is not sufficient to prepare only the mind, one needs to consider the senses and in particular the emotions.

Perhaps a summary of the findings is one quote “*the package mentally and emotionally prepared me*”. The students acknowledged that the structure, content and processes for learning provided in the CD-ROM study tool allowed them to guide their own growth. They could choose what and where they wanted to learn to meet their individual needs. The study skill area was not identified by students as immediately valuable, but was acknowledged as a useful resource to be utilised in the writing of assignments on their

return to Australia. Unit expectations were available via this CD-ROM early on in their progress through the study units. Knowing about assignments early on reduced fears and allowed the students to begin collecting “data” from the moment of arrival. This was particularly noticeable for students who knew they were going to have to write and reflect on an event during their stay.

Some students who lacked computer skills expressed dismay at having to move away from the “comfort” of print-based materials. The problems of compatibility with hardware and systems were identified in particular for the viewing of some of the video clips. There were associated technical issues such as adjusting screen resolution.

A pleasing outcome was the students’ unanimous comment that they were surprised at the professional quality of the CD-ROM, with the amount and scope of in-depth information and in particular the range and quality of the links provided. This response was an acknowledgement for the researchers that their decisions on pedagogy, technical and aesthetic decisions had been worthwhile. In fact, many users reported needing to access the CD-ROM much earlier than one month prior to departure.

One clear indication for improvement was the need to introduce more video footage. The use of video clips enables the learner to experience vicariously the new environment and to help them unpack and repack their cultural and educational suitcases.

Students also reported requiring more information on Sumatra and daily life in Padang. They specifically requested detailed information on practical matters helpful for their daily “survival”, for example about banking and monetary exchange rates between the rupiah and the Australian dollar, further information on maintaining good health while in Indonesia, and about suitable clothing to pack. As regards the school experience, students required information on school expectations and insight into school contexts in which they would be placed. Finally students required more information on “likely” areas they may experience cultural mismatch.

Future directions

The designers intend that the discussion board will be introduced using a WebCT platform earlier so that members of the group can begin to “meet” and establish connections. These changes based upon feedback about the 2001 program are already being integrated into the preparation design of the 2002 material. More practical information on daily life in Indonesia and handy hints on how students should make the most of the experience will be included in a “Traveller’s Tips” page. One final addition will be personal reflections by previous students of their experiences of the Teach_Indo program.

The researchers are considering adapting this idea for overseas students coming to study and live in Tasmania to help them prepare for their Australian experience. The idea may be adopted by other faculties having field component to their study program could consider helping to prepare their students with such a CD-ROM. Conference organisers,

especially those involved in international conference preparation could develop such a model to assist delegates to feel “at home” much faster! The value lies not in putting brochures and books on disc, but in inviting the participant into an interactive learning process.

What was unpacked?

Designers had to unpack their own pedagogical beliefs and intents in the framework of a new medium. Via the CD-ROM, the learners were given an opportunity to explore new cultures and value systems in a safe environment before arrival at their destination! The designers admit that ultimately some “items” were forgotten or “left behind”. There is no way that a program such as this can fully prepare people and as educators the designers maintain that would defeat the purpose of exposing teachers to the benefits of an in-country experience. One of the valuable components of an in-country experience is that no-one can fully be prepared for the physical, cultural and emotional shock and excitement of the heat, dirt, colour, smell and noise and sheer exhilaration of being in a new and very different culture such as that of West Sumatra.

The “The Art of Unpacking” functioned on many levels. Firstly, the effect was felt by us personally, as designers learning to work in a new collaborative role in order to make our beliefs and understandings of teaching and learning transparent to each other. Secondly, we needed to use our expertise to share that understanding with the technical staff assisting us develop the resource. Thirdly we needed to share our intentions with the learners as they interacted with the content and processes of the CD in their preparation for their own personal journeys.

Bringing the analogy back to the packing and unpacking of a suitcase, the Teach_Indo package designers maintain that there is an art to preparing for a journey, literally and figuratively. Literally, experience had taught us that rolling the contents of the suitcase, rather than laying the items out flat, allows for smaller areas of space to be filled. Figuratively, the systematic preparation and comprehensive “packing” was solid preparation for a successful journey. It was clearly, in the designers’ opinions, the CD-ROM medium that allowed the “space” for the rolled items to fit. The flexibility of the ICT additions, such as websites and video clips, enabled us to pack for more layers within this “suitcase”. The designers of this package certainly had to unpack and justify their professional, pedagogic and personal “knowledges” suitcases in order to fully realise the potential of this medium of delivery. We could contemplate but not fully prepare. Contemplation is looking up and out from traditional familiarity and use, out of “a place marked out” (Yinger 1990, p.87). The contents of the CDROM could be laid out, but we had no way of knowing what would be selected, how, when, or by whom. The focus was the learner interacting and unpacking with the resources to meet their needs. Once the disc was burned, the “art of unpacking” belonged to the learners.

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