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**The Dialectics of Cross-Cultural collaboration: Malaysia and Australia: Case Study  
EME150 Introduction to Learners and Learning Theory**

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**Abstract**

This paper is a discussion of some of the key issues and problems that arose because of Deakin University working with three Malaysian Teachers Institutes in the provision and a course of study that we worked on in collaboration with Malaysian colleagues. This paper seeks to look at the issues and problems that arose in such an endeavour with a view to understanding what global education truly entails out side of the rhetoric. In so doing we hope to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of intercultural and global collaboration in education using the Deakin/Malaysian Teachers Institute work as an important reference. The paper will investigate how to improve on global education and what the actual pitfalls are in such a process. This will be done in reference to theory. The aim of the paper will be show how the reality of distance and global education necessitates equal partnership between providers and how equal collaboration and dialogue is the only sustainable way to move forward in a truly globalized world.

*Key Words : Malaysia, Learning Theory, Teachers Colleges, Collaboration*

**Introduction**

Currently in Malaysia, the 2020 plan is leading to liberalized educational policies and a more democratic, privatized, and decentralized educational system. In pursuing these goals, Malaysia works in cooperation with external institutions to develop and modernise the curriculum. The work of Deakin University must be seen within this broader framework. In collaboration with Deakin University, three Malaysian Teaching institutes have been involved in a program to establish and run a degree for Malaysian trainee teachers that would help advance the standards of Malaysian teacher training. Deakin alongside another Australian University and two UK

Universities was selected for this important program. This is an example of global partners in education delivering a primary education degree in Malaysia.

The process of globalization means that education becomes even more centrally important to government. This complex and multilayered process, offers many opportunities to change for the better. At the same time we are confronted with the possibility that globalization merely reinforces already existing inequalities. The problems of global competitiveness, competition and the very real issue of cultural and national dignity are factors in any discussion of the problems and issues with respect to collaboration and globalization in education.

### **The Program**

EME 150 **Introduction to Learners and Learning Theory** is part of a broader capacity-building plan for Malaysian teaching institutions. This capacity building involves moving from a three-year diploma to four year degree with increased capacities in Math and Science as part of the broader 2020 emphasis on these two areas. According to the accreditation document agreed to by Deakin University and the Malaysian Ministry of Education: 'The courses aim[s] to provide specialist skills for primary teaching with emphasis on development of enhanced competencies in the areas of mathematics and science disciplines.' The competencies and expectations include:

- The competencies expected of beginning teachers by the education profession;
- The communication and interpersonal skills required to be facilitative teachers;
- A capacity for analytical and critical thinking expressed by an ability to engage with contemporary educational issues both generally and in particular areas of specialisation;
- An awareness of the socio-political role of education in society, an understanding of the impact of economic and ideological change on the practice of educators, and an appreciation of the cultural imperatives expressed through educational institutions and teaching practices;
- The capacity to be flexible, adaptable and futures orientated.
- An appreciation of and commitment to social justice through development of a clear understanding of the social origins of disadvantage.'(University 2006a)

EME150 Introduction to Learners and Learning Theory was based on a full understanding of contemporary learning theory and was designed to be an introduction to learning theory and was one of six Education units offered as part of the 32 unit course. EME150 Introduction to

Learners and Learning Theory is a unit, which is part of the Education studies stream being taught in Malaysian teaching institutes. The design, content and pedagogics of this unit were central in the delivery and design of the basic issues below: The basic aim of the unit is to engage and teach learning theory to Malaysian trainee primary school teachers. The course taught is part of a broader Deakin initiative in regards to internationalisation and has posed quite a challenge for all staff involved.

Discussions about the development of the unit prior to delivery posed the following issues. We were immediately confronted with what Bullivant refers to as 'cultural grammar' in our teaching and approach to course construction (Bullivant 1978). How do we provide a unit that effectively teaches content in a situation that is cross-cultural and where English is not the primary language? How do we do this in a context where we cannot monitor the situation in a constant way?(Kempner and Subramani 2002) One key concern was how to take seriously Deakin University's operational policy on culturally inclusive practice? This was a key influence on course development across broader frameworks to local considerations

Deakin University lays claim to valuing, 'inclusive curricula value cultural difference and diversity'(University 2006c). On top of this, Deakin's policy regarding the attributes of excellent teaching is also of critical relevance. Excellent teachers according to this policy, use 'appropriate design and delivery of content and course materials which maximises the use of diverse learning environments and a variety of communication modes'. They also, organise 'course material effectively and presenting it cogently and imaginatively' (University 2006b).

The approach to working in a collaborative environment was influenced and guided by a close reading of the work of critical pedagogues from Paulo Freire through to Henry Giroux (Freire 1972; Giroux 1988a) . These thinkers provide a good introduction into the concept of equal and respectful dialogue in education rather than top down imposition. We took seriously the progressive argument that teachers are not merely implementers of curriculum but have a critical role to play as interpreters of it. – this was translated to a collaborative working relationship rather than a directed approach.

However, the most significant intellectual input came from a close reading of the Malaysian centred literature. S.L. Wong's work for example deeply influenced the belief that a constructivist approach could work in Malaysia education (Wong and al. 2003). Hairul N. Ismail's work on

cooperative learning strategies was also influential (Ismail 2005). Other useful and instructive writers whose work was consulted included, Nora Zakaria's (Zakaria and Simpson 2004) work in solving problems and the insightful approach of Ramlee Mustapha and Abu Abdullah in their analysis of globalization and its impact on Malaysian educational institutions. (Mustapha and Abdullah 2001)

This was a two-tiered approach working collaboratively with staff and providing engaging constructivist approaches to shift current pedagogy and practices within the classroom. The 'buy in' of Deakin University and other partner Universities was clearly linked to an overt reform agenda which was a move away from the exam based system to a more liberal and pedagogical engaged practices that do not rely on the examination as the sole means of assessment and instruction.

### **Initial Design**

It was clear that there was a strong sense of reform agenda amongst the staff in the three colleges in initial conversations. They were hampered by the dominance of the examination on the education system at all levels. The reform for education could rest with the Deakin program, as it was external to the Ministry of Education although the Ministry of education was funding the proposal. This clear agenda influenced the intent and pedagogy of the first education Studies unit EME 150.

When we started to design the content of this course, we followed the outline presented to us as part of the initial agreement with the Malaysian Ministry of Education. This is the accreditation document. The respective bureaucracies of Deakin University and the Malaysian Education Ministry had agreed to the basic aims and objectives of the course. Therefore, we were operating within an already existing framework. Designing the materials and lecture format was up to staff involved. In addition, the course was influenced and drawn from existing Deakin units in the Education Studies Major Program. Therefore, the first thing we did was to look at the general topics covered under the agreement. Then we made some critical decisions regarding the themes for each week. These were, informed by the relevant agreements. The salient point here is that much of this was done *prior* to the first meeting we had with Malaysian colleagues.

### **Developing Content**

We decided on the lecture topics and added some cross cultural and historical dimension to the course. This was designed as much as a corrective to the overly ahistorical way that learning theory is often taught. It was also designed to provide a segue into the diverse cultural understanding of what is taught. It often appears that learning theory is often taught as if it is without a historical, political or cultural dimension (Power 1991). It seemed that the content of a course like this, needed to be informed by a sense of its own cultural historicity. In short we were confronted by the problems of international education (Vestal 1994) which included the difficulties of working across cultures in ways that were not imperious. We wrote a series of around 15 lectures providing the Malaysian staff with the instructional materials, which were important to the design and support of the learning topic. This was used as a basis for negotiation. This was the intent, that there was a point of reference for consensus.

### **Course Design and Structure**

The beginning of the EME 150 had some historical and cultural perspectives and the idea was to maintain that perspective throughout the semester. The basic materials consisted of readings largely though not entirely gleaned from similar topics taught in Deakin and web site urls to relevant information. We had tried to get readings from Malaysian sources however on discussion with my Malaysian colleagues we found that they to used readings from similar sources. The key to effectively integrating the materials with the course seemed to lie in the pedagogy and emphasis (Barone 2004) We were involved in training teachers and we needed to instil creative thinking and the ability to think out side the square. A review of how the materials were received in the course was achieved in two ways. First, we gave the students a feedback form, which solicited their responses to the overall course of studies and included some questions pertinent to EME 150. This was followed by actually asking the students during the feedback period for their opinions (Cohen 1980) . Finally, we asked the teaching staff for their feedback on the readings and course content. The following is a summation of feedback from the staff conducted in Santubong Sarawak: after the completion of the moderation phase of the course.

### **Course Content**

- The power-point lectures were good
- Power-point slides were adapted with Additional slides to enhance clarity and

understanding

- Topics like child development enhancing children's learning should be considered as part of the course content

### **Reader**

- Comprehensive
- Excellent guide
- Too difficult for students to comprehend and thus put off students reading
- Reader is quite tough for lecturer and the students except for a few topics
- Students have difficulty in understanding the reader because of language. (Dyer and Campbell 2006)

It was clear that the course had met aims and that there was a general level of satisfaction with the course. All staff found that the course had met the aims of the course to a satisfactory and above level. The findings reinforced and confirmed the theoretical and practical observations we had made. One of the critical findings of the review process concerning course content came through the feedback both formal and informal. Despite our attempt to think outside the square concerning content it was very clear that a more rigorous and lengthy negotiation between the Malaysian colleagues and ourselves would have significantly improved the outcomes which were already quite impressive.

This is a critical observation. It speaks volumes in regards to the actual processes and outcomes resulting from cooperation in a globalized world. Nowhere is this more necessary than in education. The key lesson (and this is reinforced in almost all the examples) is that the problems of course design are also issues strongly connected to the nature of the collaboration between respective parties.

### **Teaching and learning in English**

The problem of providing readings which are both of a high standard yet accessible to students where English is not their first language is difficult to overcome. Of concern was the level of readings that were included in the reader. The readings were too difficult for the majority of students where English was not their first language this was seen in comments such as: The

'Reader is quite tough for lecturer and the students except for a few topics'(Dyer and Campbell 2006)

This is the intersection of the course requirements and the reality of the students. We recognised this issue through the feedback. For many of the students English was not simply a second language it was often the third language. This was something we discussed early on and was a key spur to my attempt to reform the pedagogy. We had designed the readings to be done within a framework of teaching and learning activities that would ameliorate the problems associated with language. I will go into some detail in discussing the relationship between the materials, pedagogics and assessment strategies since in the design of the unit they were all interrelated.

### **Course Dilemmas**

Essentially, we faced some interesting dilemmas in designing the course. First, we had the issue of English language proficiency (Kim 2003) . Second, we had the issue of how to relate the theory we were teaching into pedagogics in the classroom. Finally, we had the issue of assessment. We designed an approach that tried to deal with all of these issues in a coordinated way given the cultural diversity involved. We realised that the readings by themselves were difficult and that in many cases they represented views derived from mostly western and often American sources.

One interesting observation from designing the course is that similar courses in Malaysia cover very similar theoretical ground. Overlapping theories of learning were found. Vygotsky, Piaget and others are widely covered in Malaysian courses. One critical difference is that the quality of the readings in the local courses sometimes relies on books that are local productions derived from foreign sources. The readings are sometimes not at the level expected from Deakin University. Therefore, while our review ascertained that the readings were difficult for the students this was something we knew of early on. We hoped to design an approach to the teaching activities and assessment that would ameliorate the problems of difficult readings. In self-evaluating the materials, we determined that we needed to be involved in a closer and more sustained negotiation on the materials with Malaysian colleagues. The critical lesson learned from

this is that for globalized cooperation to work requires very close and equal engagement from all parties. This lesson, which is simple, is one that needs constant iteration.

### **Teaching and Learning Strategies**

Deakin staff work with the Malaysian staff to build and design a course informed and developed by existing courses at Deakin however this occurs in a context of collaboration, design debate across a time periods of four days called induction. The basic approach was to combine the themes from the lectures with pedagogical exercises that demonstrated the basic theories we taught. On top of this, the idea was to internalise the readings within the tutorial structure. What does this mean? What does it look like? Essentially, we decided to include in the tutorial activities certain activities such as Jigsawing, Plus Minus and Interesting. These activities are based on a collaborative approach and require higher order thinking skills: they are not a didactic approach and other teaching and learning tools, which could help students address the readings in class (Ruddok 1978).

We designed the pedagogy as collaborative learning and activity based learning. In this way, the teacher could supervise and engage with the problems of the readings in real time. Jig sawing for example, enables students to read a small section of a selected article and discuss it in groups and allows the teacher to address issues as they arise. In discussions with the lecturers, we aimed at also getting them to read and grasp the articles so that they could focus and draw the attention to the significant sections. In this way the combination of these two basic techniques, specific teaching tools such as Jigsawing and teacher focus on the significant part of the readings helped (in principle) to deal with the problem of ESL.

The idea of the readings was to supplement the ideas and learning in the course. The readings were not the central focus. The pedagogy was the central focus. Active learning was the key. We tried to get the students away from having to read long articles not understand them and get in trouble in class for not understanding English. The course is not an English language test (Thang 2005). Cognisant in the way in which the course was developed was the need for a reform agenda that was linked to pedagogy; activity based learning engaged and authentic learning with a shift away from the influence of exams. No unit had solely an exam and exams consisted of 40% of the unit's weight.

The approach was for the articles to supplement the lectures and pedagogics in the classroom. The idea was to engage the students in authentic learning of the subject matter. The articles in this way would be supplementary to the learning not central to it. This would avoid the problem of focussing on English, and not break the students self esteem. The general approach was to organise teaching activities, which would help demonstrate the theory taught. Theoretically this approach seemed to square a difficult circle. How do we combine progressive teaching with culturally aware and diverse teaching without sacrificing standards? Well the irony is that it is precisely the combination of these two things that raises standards.

### **Group Work**

We had to move away from an overly reductive idea that rote and testing was an adequate response to the problems of learning. So for example, we put group work and brainstorming into the creative thinking classes. The idea was that the actual tutorials would demonstrate the theories and different approaches to learning in creative ways, which would shift focus away from reading towards doing(Tozer, Anderson, and Armbruster 1990). This approach was in keeping with Deputy Education Minister Fong Chan Onn's claim that the new assessment system in Malaysian education will be based more on performance and less on tests(Onn 1998). The fact that we were training teachers indicates the necessity of getting them to deeply learn the content and practice of teaching. We were involved in shifting assessment and learning away from teacher centred and rote styled to student centred and praxis oriented.

The essential practical problem we faced in the course was that for many of the students English was not their first or even in some cases second language. In the Malaysian context students usually speak their familial language at home. For example, students of Cantonese extraction will speak Cantonese in their everyday interactions; Malay students will converse in Malay and Tamil students in Tamil. While Malay is the national language it is far from certain that all student are equally proficient in it (Male 1986) .(Male 1986) English may at best be the number two language but more often than not is number three or even fourth. Our course the unit is not a study of English yet English proficiency is critical in many courses that rely on complex reading drawn mostly from English speaking sources.

We were faced with this dilemma and the problem of the discourse of academic respectability. In other words, we were constantly reminded of the need to maintain academic standards. Part of this discourse entails having readings that are 'respectable' academically. However, with globalization we need to challenge and question what we mean by standards in a globalized world of complexity and contentions around a 'global' set of standards.

For example, in contexts where English is a difficulty and cultural difference is taken seriously then how does that affect the discourse of standards? When resources are scarce how do we use internet to 'democratize' availability of resources? What if internet access is itself problematic? How were we going to 'bridge the gap' and internationalise our course while at the same time not impose a culturally imperial perspective masquerading under the rubric of standards (Leask 2001)? One of the one of crux's of the process the merging and collaborating and developing consensus in a borderless course.

We to try to use freely available web information such as references through Wikipedia, which are often written in a clear and accessible manner. However, there is a strong prejudice against the use of resources such as Wikipedia in academia and thus using it as an accessible resource. What's more, in the context we were teaching in internet access was uneven and sometimes difficult. Therefore, we focused on looking at what it was that we wanted to teach. The answer was that we wanted to produce good teachers who had a facility in learning theory. Therefore, we focussed on embedding the actual pedagogics and practices within the tutorial structure.

### **Refining Pedagogy and Practice**

Reviewing the pedagogical strategy occurred during our visits to Malaysia. Essentially, we found several things. First, we found that, those who attended the induction were much better prepared to engage with the type of pedagogy necessary for effective work in the classroom. The induction program entailed negotiation among colleagues with regards to the course, pedagogy and content. It was a critical moment. The induction process revealed itself as a critical component of the entire program. Those who attended induction were intellectually across the pedagogy those who did not might not have been so committed. This was because there was a shared set of practices discussion debate and sharing that melded and shaped a team.

What we found was that when the teachers approached the teaching in the way we had agreed the results in student participation and satisfaction were high. However, there was the difficulty of not really knowing after the induction what really happens in the classroom. Such issues are of course similar to classroom across the world. The critical key was the negotiation process about what that had occurred during induction and before. For me the critical component of success or otherwise in the project was the quality and quantity of negotiation and equal dialogue between staff at both Deakin and Malaysia.

One way of outlining the issues at stake is to draw attention to the idea that teachers have to be intellectuals who share in the creative vision of a course and are not mere recipients of the course (Giroux 1988b) (Giroux 1988b). The key issue that came of that process was to reinforce the importance, indeed centrality of negotiation and participation of all parties in the process of course development. This finding is to me one of the most critical and in need of clear and deep thought. The importance of the globalisation process linked to personal and collegiate relationships that are built and developed.

### **Assessment**

It was a requirement that had to have an exam: this was a given. The other tasks required much negotiation. The course work assessment opened up much conversation about how that would occur. A key assessment within that structure was the group presentation, which we gave a significant percentage of the overall grade. The group presentation was divided into two sections. The first section was the actual presentation on a topic drawn from the themes of the lectures. Each group gave a presentation on a specific learning theory. This involved a power point but was not limited to it. The students did two presentations and the best mark from the best presentation was the one they received. This gave them the opportunity to make mistakes and conversely gave the teachers a chance to improve and understand how to grade and teach to the assessment and presentation. The overall effect was to address pedagogically the issue of difficult content difficulty in English and difficulty in teaching.

The techniques are drawn from basic progressive and culturally informed theory. Apparently, simple yet in many respects effective. The second component of the presentation task was a written exposition of what had been done. We did this to ensure that each individual student could present a written piece demonstrating his or her grasp of the topic. However, we ensured

that this was not a major part of the assessment but rather part of a broader assessment profile. From our student and staff discussions in Malaysia, several insights came to us for improvement of this section of the course.

First, we could see from student feedback that the effective understanding by the lecturers of the pedagogy that we embedded in the weekly schedule was critical to the course. In some cases, it was the students through their presentations that taught the content of the course that week. It was critical to our strategic decision to move away from a course that discussed effective learning strategies towards one that enacted them. The presentations were designed to complement and draw upon this pedagogy. It was this component of the course that was seen to be a great success and staff wanted the continuance of this into the next unit. If however the lecturer adhered to a more traditional model of pedagogics, top down drill or rote instruction then the modelling needed for the presentations would be remiss. The essential problem that we discovered was that if the classes were conducted in a way that did not seek to engage and enact the theory they became boring, top heavy and the effect on our assessment tasks was significant. This is because our assessment tasks were strongly related to the pedagogic aims of the unit. We cannot stress enough the importance of consistency across the message and messenger.

For example, since we were asking students to present and be graded on a presentation on learning theory the sort of practice and modelling that comes from the student dialogue, role play and other methods critical to learning theory must be taught. If this did not occur then the presentations may become stilted and the students not do so well. Why? The reason for the poor presentations would not be poor student commitment or ability rather we would be assessing something we never gave the student the opportunity to learn. In other words, we would be assessing something we are not teaching.

In Bourdieu's terms, we would be expecting from our students a type of capital we never taught them (Bourdieu 1983). This is a common practice where and not just in a cross-cultural context. However, in the cross cultural context that characterises the Malaysian EME 150 the issue is even more important. The reason for this is that we are teaching forms of collaborative learning and theory, which are still culturally imbedded. The feedback from the Malaysian lecturers regarding the group presentations is summarised below:

### **Group Presentation**

It was clear that students really engaged in this task. The evidence from teachers was that there was a high degree of engagement with this task from students and engagement provides for a richer learning environment. The task also motivated students to read and to be well informed about the topic. It was a motivation for reading. Some comments from staff relating to this task were:

- We were able to master the topic and perform activities which related to learning classroom experience
- Students did put in effort to present and indirectly they need to read up and prepare for the task
- Students put in a lot of effort and participated well into co-operative learning as well as contextual and experimental learning (Dyer and Campbell 2006)

The task motivated students to learn they worked hard and enjoyed the learning process. The results of our evaluation of the group presentation were instructive. To shift students from that to actually engaging with the theory entails a cultural shift in the practices of the classroom. This at a minimum means that this shift has to be embedded consciously in the pedagogics. Therefore, the assessment tasks and the ongoing pedagogy and content have to be clearly related, culturally sustainable and able to be taught. This requires active engagement in course design that takes into account cultural issues and the centrality of dialogue. A critical lesson we learned was that the underlying constructivist approach to teaching this subject in the Malaysian context could work. However as expected the details of implementation across three campuses and across 12 staff varied. This finding is in keeping with significant research done by Wong et.al as well as by Neo and Neo (Neo and Neo 2002; Wong and al. 2003). The next type of assessment was individual presentation:

### **Individual Presentation**

The comments here showed that the individual presentation were well received by staff and students. It provided the opportunity to reflect on their learning. The individual presentations of work revealed many of the ongoing issues that working in an English language environment bring to teaching in Malaysia. It also revealed the necessity of working closely on pedagogical

innovation with Malaysian colleagues in order to engage the issues of English proficiency. The essential issue is that teaching a course like learning theory in a cross-cultural situation requires progressive pedagogy to make it work. This is because simple imposition of rote materials from one culture to another simply does not work.

#### **What were the strengths of this task?**

- Good it gives students opportunities to reflect on their topic chosen, students will have to understand the topic before they can write a reflection on its implications to them as learners and primary school teachers
- Students were able to apply the theories learnt to themselves as a learner and as a primary school teacher
- Able to write reflectively for the first time in English
- Prepare students to take on role of teacher presenter and develop confidence sharpen the skills of presentation (Dyer and Campbell 2006)

To actually maintain and improve standards it is imperative to shift away from traditional modes of instruction, which have not engaged students as much in their own learning and developed responsibility. They have been passive rather than active learners. On top of this, we were faced with an exam component so we sought to ameliorate the negative consequences of such a format. The following is a summation of the responses to the exam:

#### **Exam**

Note the importance of learning in an across cultural context. The Malaysian staff analysed the structure of the exam. This is shown in comments such as:

- More challenging questions were needed since it is an open book test eg. problem solving questions and applications to theories to solve it
- Structuring exam questions needs to be improved eg. short answer with 2 marks, we can ask them to state, list or ask 'what questions. Basically Part C and Part D are application questions, can also ask problem solving questions

It is clear that the staff want an exam that moved beyond rote to develop higher order skills and engaged activities such as problem based activities. Here the learning was for the Deakin University staff.

### **What were the strengths of this task?**

- The students had to prepare a portfolio and it is useful

What were the negative consequences of an exam? The interesting aspect of the exam was what we learnt about exam construction. For example, the call for a higher order exam is clear in the comments. The exam developers had had little experience with developing exams compared to the Malaysian colleagues. The key negative consequence concerned the correlation between English competency and exam proficiency. If we were not examining students for English proficiency, what is it we are looking for? Exams are an important form of summative assessment yet in the traditional form is not a particularly good way to solicit the extent to which a student has deeply learnt and engaged with the idea and practices of progressive learning theory. On top of this, the exam can end up simply testing how a person deals with stress rather than their facility in the subject matter. Therefore, we decided that students could take in a student-developed portfolio, which documented the terms work and their own notes from each of the tutorials.

### **Use of Portfolio in the exam**

The aim of this was to get the students to use a portfolio, which they could bring to the exam. In this way, we hoped to avoid or ameliorate the issue of English as a second language. The student would be able to bring in the Portfolio and use this to answer the questions thus the exam was not an exam in quiz show ability. Rather those who had kept up the portfolio had an excellent resource for the questions. Thus, they came fully prepared. What's more, the portfolio meant that lecturers could monitor progress through out the semester and keep the students up to date. In this way, exams would not be a sudden pressure or purely summative exercise, they became application of the theory and course to questions on the exam. According to staff feedback, the 'use of the portfolio helped students greatly' (Dyer and Campbell 2006).

Given our approach to the exam, how did we intend to improve it? The problem with the portfolio approach is that it does require constant supervision. More importantly, the lecturers need to

understand the rationale for it, as do the students. In our auditing process, we discussed with the Malaysian academics the problems of the exam both from the point of view of the questions in it and the broader pedagogics involved. Essentially, the portfolio approach to the exam is a useful and creative way to overcome the limitations of the exam process. However, the portfolio itself relies on adequate grasp of the underlying pedagogics. Requirements around inclusion of content in the portfolio needed greater discussion and agreement.

If the pedagogy in the classroom was in accordance with our approach then the reflections and examples in the portfolio would hopefully reflect this. The student would have a deeper learning of the intent of the course. If however the pedagogy were content driven and rote style then the portfolio would tend to reflect this. For students whose first language is not English this would result in a problem since the idea of the portfolio was not simply that the students brought in piles of articles. Such an approach, would accentuate the problems of rote and regurgitation pedagogy and fail to demonstrate the values of the course.

One of the interesting findings from the feedback was the positive responses the Malaysian lecturers gave in regards to the collaboration and engagement between Deakin staff and the staff at the Malaysian teaching institutes. This positive feedback reinforced our view that this collaboration and the values that underpin it are key pointers for success in any cross-cultural project. (Dyer and Campbell 2006) The data and responses indicate a need for closer collaboration and negotiation between Malaysian colleagues and the Deakin team. This feedback is instructive for it reveals how important it is to constantly engage with our partners in the micro design of the course. This observation is in keeping with the best theory in cross-cultural collaboration and is critical in any program of this type. Finally, we asked our Malaysian colleagues about how they felt concerning professional learning. Below is a collation of the responses:

### **Professional Learning**

#### **As a result of being involved in this unit I...**

- Sharpen my skills in education and helped me to understand my students better
- Knowledge and more confidence
- Use of portfolio in the exam
- Opportunity to lecture in English, in preparing for the lectures I have also gained much

knowledge from my own reading

- Gained more knowledge in conducting my class, more readings have a chance to teach in English, instruction and share ideas with Deakin lecturers

**The strengths of being involved in this unit have been**

- New ideas professional exchange of knowledge sharing of resources
- Got to know better the students and teaching techniques
- Exchange ideas and opinions etc
- Actually teaching my students through activity based teaching. Not just do what I say but do what I do Being a model for my students as far as teaching is concerned
- As the students gave their presentations I gain extra knowledge in terms of class activities because some students have interesting class activity

What then was the result for the professional competencies of the Malaysian educators? The following results list the comments from our Malaysian colleagues regarding professional learning. According to them:

**Professionally and personally, I have learnt:**

- Exchange ideas and opinions
- Improve my own presentation and teaching
- Sharing of ideas with other colleagues as well as colleagues from other institutions
- The use of portfolios during the exam to enhance my students learning a great idea as a motivation factor to encourage students to learn

The responses in regards to professional learning are instructive concerning the success of the collaborative model used in the course. They represent a very good articulation of the many benefits that accrue to professionals working in a stimulating and dialogical environment. Finally we asked our colleagues for a general view on working cross culturally:

**Can you describe working in a cross cultural project such as this – Australian University, across three sites in Malaysia.**

- Interesting and totally new experience it improved my style and performance
- Good in the sense we could exchange ideas see the different work style and take the good points into our examination system
- Exchange ideas and opinions thoughts from different perspectives
- Great opportunity to share knowledge and ideas and opinions (Dyer and Campbell 2006)

The basic point is that all the components of the course from pedagogy to assessment are interrelated and the effective outcome is one that requires effective engagement with all. Here in lies the strength of the course and its critical weakness. The key problem we face in the course was that we did not ensure adequately enough that the teachers all attended induction. While this was mandatory, the reality was different. In the institutes where the teachers attended the induction the correlation with progressive pedagogy was marked. In terms, of improvement the issue of follow through is critical. However, the critical lesson learned is that in the Malaysian context, critical and progressive pedagogy is very possible to deliver but in the globalized world, collaboration must be based on equality and respect. Such collaborations built on these values can be a significant driver for Malaysia's educational vision and the reciprocal rewards for Australian universities are high indeed.

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