

Constructing a western researcher's identity and professional integrity in difference: Restorying the encountered 'exceptional' as an act of locating possible worlds.

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Abstract

This autobiographical narrative relates to an ongoing process of 'becoming' a western researcher in post colonial contexts where plurality and difference is encountered. In such contexts, western researchers have few reference points to assist them to move beyond how they know of themselves and others premised on the lens of the culture they bring with them. This creates a potential for western researchers to remain both positioned and stunted within their own cultural formation, blunting their capacity to reflect on the implications of an ongoing colonial legacy in their work and respond to the issues and challenges such a project entails.

Further, much of the western research and its discourse has until recently been tied in with the philosophy of positivism and structuralist approaches which, emphasise description and objectivity. Positivism as a philosophy is imbued with assumptions that appear to preclude the complicated interactions of power, knowledge and values or critical reflection on the genesis and the nature of ideological presuppositions (Giroux, 2005). This results in reducing cultural and racial difference to the discourse of western culture and ultimately reproduces the distance between western and 'colonised' cultures. Therefore, if western researchers in the contexts described above, are to engage in research which serve the needs of their local counterparts, the research paradigms adopted must expose and intervene in the conditions which appear to construct the subjectivity of post colonial people thereby inserting a more generative and generous local voice into this paradigm.

This narrative paper charts the experiences of one western educational researcher as she explores her feelings of uncertainty and doubt through reflecting on processes she engaged in from the time she began her doctoral research to her present day in diverse cultural contexts in the South Pacific and Asia. This journey introduces influential colleagues, human relationships, critical incidents and events that were crucial to her 'becoming' a researcher in these contexts. It also describes those generative and creative times when she was able to voyage in, exoticise the domestic and challenge the essentialised discourse taken up and used to guide her initial reflections on the process and product of her research in those work contexts (White, 1992, p.121). This paper is about 'becoming' a western researcher in contexts where it is necessary to continually locate a space to withdraw and observe while remaining engaged but detached in order to make visible those conditions that continue to construct subjectivity and guide beliefs and practices.

Introduction

This paper represents my personal reflective journey as a western researcher employed in non-western post colonial educational contexts to establish 'capacity building' relationships. At those times, I realised that if I was to develop critical understandings about cultural and political implications in my work, I needed to understand my constructions of self and others. These types of constructions are often premised on an agreed set of values. In the education sector, this is often evidenced by what the curriculum consists of or what it does not (Giroux, 2005). The risk I initially encountered was the different ideals, principles and philosophies underpinning the surrounding ways thinking and practices which I dismissed as having limited importance or value because they differed from the dominant voice of western philosophy I resonated with. Consequently, I remained positioned and stunted within my western cultural formations, thereby blunting my capacity to reflect on the implications of my work and my responses to issues and challenges such work contexts entailed. I realised that if I was to chart a course to serve the needs of local counterparts on their own terms, I needed to engage in the process thoughtfully, moving from puzzlement to purposeful inquiry which demands "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it" (Dewey, 1933, p.9).

This reflective journey was critically underpinned by various accounts my local counterparts had expressed to me about their time in western education. These recounted experiences had a capacity to be used as formative experiences, providing me with a portal to reflect and gain insights into my own beliefs and practices. I was offered a multiple lens to critically confront and contest the plurality of knowledge and understandings that surrounded me. Ultimately, this process facilitated a critical reflection on making difference the grounds for my professional work, premised on developing a more generative edge in my professional understandings and practice – from voyaging in to writing back (Said, 1994).

This narrative journey focuses on the following three interrelated periods of my professional life:

- a part time doctoral candidate employed full time on an educational reform initiative within the Curriculum and Development Unit (CDU) of the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Education and Training Department (1997).
- an Australian contract officer working with local counterparts developing the Primary Language Syllabus in PNG (1998-1999)
- an academic in Hong Kong educating pre and in-service English language teachers but maintaining a research interest in the issue of identity formation for non native English speaking teachers (2005-2007).

These three narrative journeys were based on both recorded interviews and notes taken during discussions between colleagues, students and myself over the last decade, with the intent to develop my knowledge about what had sustained my local counterparts in western education. The specific journeys were selected because they provide insights into my professional practice and facilitate a critical journey of self discovery through the hybridisation of cultural contexts and different ways of knowing and doing beyond the binaries of the past as I knew them – 'the subject "I" who is native, authentic, at home and the object "it" or "you", who is foreign, perhaps

threatening, different, out there’ (Said, 1986, p. 40). This was a complex journey which has revealed continually shifting pathways. It began with an initial feeling of puzzlement and not belonging to eventually ‘hearing’ the complexity within my local colleagues narrative about their experiences in western education that had facilitated their ability to ‘write back’ as they actively participated in this cultural difference. It took time to become aware of a widening gap between what and how I came to know about ‘education’ in post-colonial contexts and actually ‘hear’ what my non-western colleagues and students were saying. This narrative charts the development of my new identity as a western educator through processes which have provided me with a space to think differently. As Clandinin and Connelly (2002, p. 18) asserted, “ Experience is what we study , and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it”.

A. *Reflective experience one –A Curriculum Officer within the PNG Curriculum Development Unit*

The new National syllabus was to be the first since PNG Independence in 1975. Policy makers had embraced through education the challenge of responding to and valuing both traditional and western knowledge forms in order to enable Nationals to develop the skills necessary to live and work effectively within a range of cultures. Yet the developed changes underway took place where substantial traces of the colonial and neo-colonial movement existed (Young, 2008). When I first took up a position in the CDU, I drew intuitively on aspects of my cross-cultural education practice in Australia. This was because as Brunner (1990, p. 33) states, “The very shape of our lives – through the rough and perpetually changing draft of an autobiography that we carry in our minds – is understandable to ourselves only by virtue of those cultural systems on interpretation”.

I brought with me particular western principles and practices which required students to move through sequences of Eurocentric learning activities to demonstrate particular knowledge and skills. Yet I was engaging in a Papua New Guinean educational context where there is a plurality of conflicting cultural ways of organising knowledge and the value afforded to what constitutes knowledge. I knew very little about these. When I found the narrative of my colleagues’ experience in education different from my understanding, I relied on interpretative procedures derived from my culturally determined patterns and beliefs for rendering meaning. As Brunner (1990, p. 49-50) found, “The function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern”. My experience of education in PNG at that time risked retaining a form of the Eurocentric ‘master narrative’ and was not very different to that of other contract officers who believed that their local counterparts would learn effectively according to western knowledge and practices.

A colleague Willie had undertaken tertiary studies at an Australian university. He was critically aware that many Papua New Guinean colleagues through their time in western education had learned that the knowledge, histories, ideas and values of their families and communities had significance if they were connected to the ‘universal’ culture of those who are ‘European, white, male, Christian...’, (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 304). Clearly I had yet to appreciate this reality for my local colleagues.

Insights gained from dialogue with a local colleague- Willie.

Willie – Papua New Guinea Principal	Kathie – Australian Curriculum Officer
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Education Officer and colleague	
<p><i>It is important for Papua New Guineans to move from how they think about contract officers. For contract offices to come and work in Papua New Guinea is to say they know how PNG works. If I was teaching in Australia and I wanted to do something, I'd ask you first. You are the local and I need to consult you. Then I would ask your advice and follow what you think is important.</i></p> <p><i>However what you think may be right for the people of PNG, but it is false. It becomes your decision and it will be implemented. I'm afraid that this is what is happening here. It is a contributing factor in neo-colonialism.</i></p> <p><i>It is the same as when I walk into a bank to take out a loan. I have to give that and that and that as security. The most important aspect I have to give away is my mother's name as security so I can access say 20 000 kina. They take that from me, it makes me feel that I'm a nobody. I can be used. I can be someone with no principles, values and beliefs. If we humans as one race versus another try to go against the pre-planned world then we are in trouble, no problems.</i></p>	<p><i>As a curriculum officer, I knew how to organise my work premised on my recent prior experience in indigenous education in Australia and the Solomon Islands. I expected, as had been my previous experience, that with my local counterparts we could share our professional understandings about resources, processes and practices we could adopt and adapt in the material.</i></p> <p><i>This did not happen. The understanding I gained was that we all worked on our individual projects and as an expat, I had been recruited because I was the 'expert'. I would often try to engage in a professional conversation about content that was unfamiliar or different ways in which knowledge was understood. This was not taken up with by my colleagues beyond a basic explanation. I remained on the outside and chose to ensure I completed the writing task I had been employed to by drawing on my recent past beliefs and practices I was familiar with.</i></p>

During this time, as a western educator regardless of my orientations, I inculcated a continuation of western values into education as well as a narrative that privileged western forms of education in this context. Papua New Guinean educational planners continued to seek assistance from Australia to provide staff in areas where there was a teacher and technical staff shortfall.

The above narrative table encapsulates two different but related aspects of neo-colonialism which I was only vaguely aware of at that time. First was the notion of power to take over and impose one's cultural ways of knowing and organising, in this case in the education context. Second, the practices outlined above essentially disguised the power I had taken and imposed by developing a regime with me as the expert and a typically 'uncritical' audience. As a consequence, it could be argued that the beliefs and practices I held functioned to keep the culture of western education intact at the expense of the local context.

I did not in fact and was unable to confront and contest increasing discrepancies that existed between my experiences and knowledge and those of my local counterparts. I was under no

pressure to discover a local voice. I expected my local counterparts to function according to my western knowledge and practices. When they seemed reluctant to do so, I tended to impose my own way of thinking and doing. Clearly I had yet to appreciate that western education developed a curriculum designed to prepare Papua New Guineans for a world different from the one they had been born into. My actions signified yet another attack on what they valued and considered as their birthright. They found that their languages, culture and knowledge gave meaning to and in the world were devalued. Willie spoke of the consequences of this.

Willie and Kathie in a dialogue about the impact of foreign curriculum officers on the work of local counterparts

Willie – Papua New Guinea Principal Education Officer and colleague	Kathie – Australian Curriculum Officer
<p><i>...I end up depending on someone else to do the work for me. Not with me but for me. The overseas staff feel that the tasks should be done in a certain way and I'm not critically encouraged to look at the situation. I respect that Papua New Guinea is part of the wider world but independence has to be there. And it is not. We are given the idea that we are capable. It is no longer a case of what can I do for you.</i></p> <p><i>The more Papua New Guineans try to show their capabilities, their skills, what they are capable of doing, and that they are doing, you will find someone from overseas will say that is not the way to go. You as a Papua New Guinean will feel that maybe s/he is right. You feel that this guy is more experienced and knowledgeable than I am so I had better do what s/he says.</i></p>	<p><i>At that time, I was aware that my colleagues were not keen to critically review what I had developed and nor were they keen to offer suggestions about what direction I could take to complete the task I had been given. I had had some input from holding writing sessions with local teachers but what they had suggested on occasions seemed not to resonate with the approach and ways of knowing I was comfortable with.</i></p> <p><i>When we eventually brought the material together, colleagues were very reluctant to share. I felt that they expected me to redevelop aspects of their material documentation. In the interests of completing the task on time, I did so.</i></p>

Reflecting on the consequences of an uncritical acceptance of an authority unconnected to the context

As an Australian contract officer in PNG, I identified with western culture. The story of my local colleagues' experience in education remained a mystery to me. I did not consider that my attitudes and beliefs meant that my colleagues were at risk of being swept away as inefficient curriculum managers. I also had yet to critical analysis those beliefs and practices that gave ascendancy to western forms in this context.

As a result, I was part of a practice of education that did not value the knowledge and education expertise of local colleagues, consequentially encouraging them to sit passively on the sidelines. My actions meant that my colleagues found that their knowledge and role in western education had been effectively diminished and their prior knowledge had been patronisingly devalued. In this sense

as Said (1994) found elsewhere, my practice in education resonated with previous colonial models where the colonial schools taught generations of the native bourgeoisie important truths about history, science and western culture. Out of this learning process millions grasped the fundamentals of modern life, yet remained subordinately dependent on an authority unconnected to their context. Since one of the purposes of colonial education was to promote the history of the west, that same education also demoted native history. Thus for my colleagues, 'there were always the Englands, Frances, Germanys, Hollands as distant repositories of the Word' (Said, 1974, p.270).

Foreign values are not reproduced just through curriculum choices but more fundamentally through ongoing attitudes to education. This shaped how Papua New Guineans value and believe in their capacity to determine their future. By downplaying and dismissing the ways in which Papua New Guineans knew and had experienced education, I encouraged a form of self surveillance and adopted an attitude of false generosity (Friere, 1972). Had I been able to articulate the oppression I had become part of and critically examine the western educational forms I was implementing in Papua New Guinea, I would have realised that the conditions of consumption and production in education had not significantly altered the ongoing unequal power relations between Australian educational producers such as myself and the peripheral Papua New Guinean consumers, such as my colleagues, since Independence.

I drew on canonical patterns and discourses to know and carry out my duties (Brunner, 1990) which I then believed had been endowed with a universal legitimacy and authority. For me, the imported canon remained a powerful means of rendering the exceptional and unusual comprehensible. When I encountered a narrative of experience amongst colleagues that was different from my understanding, I drew on interpretative procedures in order to render departures from my cultural norms meaningful in my culturally determined patterns of beliefs. As Brunner (1990) notes, the function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern (pp. 49-50).

By continuing with such interpretative procedures, I was encouraged to continue to engage in my professional duties through an unproblematised western cultural lens. I remained in a privileged and uncritical position. At that time, the reality of the circumstances that shaped my time in education in Papua New Guinea had become yet another site of Western-centred notions of education.

B. Reflective experience two - Recognising and respecting surrounding differences

According to Giddens (1979, Cassell, 1993), human agency and structure are culturally implicated in the concept of power. 'Power in social systems is constituted by the resources which the existence of domination implies, and on which the exercise of power draws. These resources are seen to be at the same time structural components of social systems' (p. 91). Over time I increasingly became aware that there was a recursivity between how I knew things when I first took up this position and how things remained. When power relations are not being exercised to contain how I understand my work context, I am capable of acting otherwise.

I knew that some of the understandings and knowledge my local colleagues routinely drew on were quite different from how processes of knowledge making were conducted around me. I had initially coped with these differences by filtering out and silencing what was different from how I interpreted

things to be. Yet this behaviour had the effect of limiting my viability in this context. If I was to effectively respond to what the architect of the reform initiative described as ‘integral development for Papua New Guinea’ (Mutane, 1986), I needed to critically explore and examine how I could work in ways that recognised and respected the difference surrounding me. This required a rethink of how I defined knowledge, as well as become sensitive to and respectful of the life experiences of my colleagues. Over time through reflection, I gained insights into their stories in education as they began to trust and confided in me.

Their stories revealed new insights relating to where and when my colleagues had been able to successfully move between western and Papua New Guinean cultures and traditions during their time in western education. By taking time to listen to their stories, these narratives had the potential to provide me with an indication of the generality of challenges and issues that my colleagues confronted as they engaged in western education. Additionally, their stories revealed experiences that appeared to be positively implicated in supporting their time in western education (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1976). Finally, the broader implications or generalisations I drew from their narratives provided me with further direction for how best to respond to a post colonial world in my work context. This took time.

Revealing differences in how formal education was known and experience.

Two of my colleagues, Jaking and Darusila were important in this process. They both grew up in separate villages prior to Independence. Their initial form of western education began in local village schools, but later through boarding schools and teacher training colleges.

<p>Jaking said:</p> <p><i>When I started school, we spent half the day in school and during the other half, we did community work that we observed was normally done in the village. In the morning we completed everything in the classroom and then we went to the gardens. Our school garden was large, not just a play garden. We would go into the bush and clear the place just like the villagers did and plant crops just like the villagers. We would be using the same knowledge and skills we had learned from our parents.</i></p> <p><i>In secondary school we would just sit in class and work on the assignments we were told to do. We did not have the skills and knowledge to do assignments. We were given written work and told to do it.</i></p> <p><i>Teachers college was different from secondary school. I enjoyed it much more,</i></p>	<p>Kathie said:</p> <p><i>In Papua New Guinea, I had come to appreciate that western conceptualisations and theorising about knowledge as well as teaching styles were unfamiliar to many. I also appreciated that there was often a mismatch between more western assumptions and practices used in formal education settings compared to informal settings that were a common experience for local students.</i></p> <p><i>My colleagues had expressed discomfort and felt threatened by western conceptual frameworks, values and practices as they moved into settings very strongly reflecting forms of western education. They found it difficult to decode the knowledge forms as well as understand how they should participate in such settings. They felt that they could no longer sustain a personal commitment towards continuing in western education, and often took with them feelings of personal failure and self-worthlessness.</i></p> <p><i>It was clear that Jaking felt the generalisations,</i></p>
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<p><i>simply because there were more practical things to do. I could see how what I was taught could be done with the children in the classroom and it meant more to me to see I could improve as a classroom teacher when I adapted and adopted what I had been told in lectures to do in my classroom practice.</i></p>	<p><i>models, values and exemplars of key learning areas in her secondary schooling no longer related to her culturally acquired conceptual framework through which she perceived the world and ascribed meaning. In secondary school she experienced reification as she sat, listened and was expected to undertake activities within western parameters (McLaren: 1989).</i></p>
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Similarly Darusila spoke about connections she had been able to make between her family values, those of the community and her expatriate teachers.

<p>Darusila said:</p> <p><i>When I went to school, I learned many different things. Some of the values taught were the same as I learned at home: hard work, self reliance, and the spirit of cooperation. These values were not so different from what my mother taught us.</i></p> <p><i>Our teachers used to gather and bond with each other, usually every Sunday. When we saw that, I thought there were wonders here. There was unity and enjoyment. Some of us were lucky enough to be taken by our teachers to their homes. They taught us how to prepare meals, have table manners and they taught us how to lay the table with plates and so on.</i></p> <p><i>The same teachers encouraged us to take part in village life. I was educated before Independence when there were a lot of expatriate teachers and there was a good relationship between teachers and the community.</i></p> <p><i>My culture, the Tolai society is very strong and if we do not respect it something bad will happen. Some local customs were even carried out in school.</i></p> <p><i>I remember that at one time we had two Australian male teachers. A big ceremony was</i></p>	<p>Kathie Said;</p> <p><i>I understand that much of what can support and challenge my colleague's time in western education is complex. At times their experiences were at odds with what I expected. I was surprised at how much the allure of the west could influence people committed to their local culture to the extent that they were swept up.</i></p> <p><i>Darusila spoke strongly about her connection to home and community. She appeared to link what she knew from her own cultural value system to similar values from a different culture. As a result, Darusila was able to make connections. It seemed that what was an exceptional experience for her did not deviate much from what for her was the norm. She appeared to take on one set of cultural interpretation procedures to bridge the gap between two cultures and make cross-cultural links between values associated with hard work, self reliance and the spirit of cooperation.</i></p> <p><i>I began to realise that there were numerous concepts and ways of knowing that while heterogeneous, could be used as a foundation to create bridges between different cultural knowledge forms and learning styles.</i></p>
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going to take place. They went down to the sacred place where the Duk Duk ceremonies were held and took part. They stayed with our men and got dressed in traditional attire. We felt that our teachers had become part of us and they were giving an honour to the village. I've never seen anything like that since. It meant something special and we felt the two teachers had joined us.

I think something had connected home and school. I learned this here and I learned that there. However there were areas where we had both and we were able to fit in very well.

Reflections that reveal a space to think difference

The complexities of perspectives in the narratives reveal that cultural differences are not clearly defined. Jaking spoke about an experience that gave comfort and supported her as she engaged in an interplay between two cultures through her educational context. The narrative of school and garden experiences could be likened to a two part melody made up of one tune accompanying another, related but independent, and in accordance with fixed rules of harmony creating pleasing and satisfying experiences (Said, 1994).

On these occasions it appeared as Said (1994) had found elsewhere that while the cultural knowledge of the west did not drown out traditional knowledge and while the two cultures remained separate, they could blend sensitively one with the other. On other occasions, when other cultural values and beliefs were encountered, the result was a sense of unity of being with no discernable differentiation between chords and tunes. Darusila spoke about her perception of a link between home and school related to hard work. By linking what she perceived to be an important cultural value to a similar value in a different culture, she appeared to have created what Brunner (1990) called verisimilitude. Her narrative revealed for me that when she encountered differences between traditional and western values, she set about searching for a comprehensible hermeneutic form that implicated her in an intentional state with some canonical element in her culture. By taking western values and behaviours that were for her the exception and using one set of cultural interpretative procedures to make sense of her canonical cultural pattern, she was able to bridge the differences between the two cultures.

At that time, I wanted to understand how I could move out of the shadow of the west. This was proving difficult. By drawing on the work of Giddens (1979, Cassell, 1993), I now see the issue I faced was one of a recursivity of beliefs and practices in this context. I was part of western institutions that had sustained and supported my professional beliefs and practices. I had gained tacit stocks of knowledge about the conditions that reproduced these institutions work. I did not consciously draw on these stocks but had become routinised, sedimented and historicised into these practices and beliefs (Fay, 1975). I was beginning to realise how such ongoing beliefs and practices functioned to

sanitise local knowledge traditions in favour of those I brought with me. I wanted to take on aspects of the Papua New Guinean institution and yet retain some of what I brought with me, but not to seem so alien that my practice functioned to support an ongoing colonial legacy. I needed to forge trusting and respectful collaborations, to learn how routines and stocks of knowledge continued to shape this work place.

C. Reflective experience three –An interest in identity formation appropriate for Hong Kong

It was not until later in a different professional position in another country that I realised that I had begun to move out from a voyaging in mode to a writing back mode (Said, 1994). I found that I had through the intervening professional experiences, taken up a capacity to engage in a process of becoming of myself that incorporated much more than an identity as a western educator. This meant that as a professional, I was aware of possible sites where I could reconstruct my identity out of “a dialectic of self and other, the subject ‘I’ who is (in this case non) native....and is the object ‘it’ or ‘you’, who is native, different, out there” (Said, 1986, p. 40). In this regard I no longer chose to hold and work from a privileged position as a westerner educator. I had ‘voyaged’ in as a process of ‘dealing frontally with the metropolitan culture, using techniques, discourses and criticisms so I was better able to operate on the inside. For me, it had become a process of ‘knowing how to read.... and not detaching this from the issue of knowing what to read’ (1994, p.312).

I was able to resonate with how numerous students I engaged with had moved from desiring to be an idealised, and often taken for granted, notion of an English speaker existing in a homogenised speech community. They had now begun to negate their past beliefs and to imagine another world, a better world in which it was possible for the colonisers and the colonised to work towards liberation (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2001).

<p>Hannah, one of my students, said:</p> <p><i>When I was a (school) student I think it is impossible for Chinese people to speak English fluently but as I have grown up I see many Chinese people can do that.</i></p> <p><i>The criteria I use is not how much vocabulary you know or how complicated the sentences are that you use. The important thing is communication. If you have the desire to know more about the people you are talking to, you will want to express yourself more and you will do better. If you follow this to learn English, you will I think I am a model to demonstrate.</i></p> <p><i>My face is a Chinese face. I show to my students that we are Chinese people and that we can speak English. I am the first person to show you this as I am here to teach you guys English and achieve more than learning for exams.</i></p>	<p>Kathie said:</p> <p><i>I knew that previously some of my students were not at ease with speaking to non British native English speakers. They had been acculturated over the years to consider these and their variations of English to be inferior. Initially, it was obvious that I did not have the desired ‘British’ accent. This had an impact on the quality and quantity of conversations I had with them. For them my English represented something that was debased. They were not comfortable with it. However I realised that this was not always the case as some had decided that the desire to communicate overrode feelings of my and their inadequacy.</i></p> <p><i>I also realised at this point that we all had taken up a changed value of ‘self’ far from attempts to purify and standardise a view of which language</i></p>
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	<p><i>speakers as teachers, were judged superior.</i></p> <p><i>It meant we were able to discuss more in class and outside, with greater frequency, reflecting natural communication. I realised that I had engaged with what had once been in my case 'the other' with reference to myself. I was able to increasingly operate from outside of constructions ascribed to western educators, appropriating a balance of self and the other. Thus I was able to begin a process of undertaking a cultural shift recreating my identity, just as students and colleagues had engaged in this process.</i></p>
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This was a step forward in the development of myself as a professional. I realised that just as my students had begun to write back and recreate their identity, I too had engaged in powerful variety of hybrid work that countered beliefs and practices I had struggled with but not rejected. The issue of valuing and recognising difference as Hannah had done meant she was free to construct her own identity. I also had this freedom. No longer did I have to dwell on developing a generative edge as I had begun to hear more than where the domestic had been exoticised (White, 1992). I was able to subconsciously challenge the essentialised discourse taken up and in turn communicate effectively in multiple ways. This new space was taken up with for thinking and acting in and around a context. I was able to discover almost unconsciously how local cultural forms could inform in western educational contexts and take on a hybridity that represents a level of knowing and practices beyond the binaries of the past. I still connected to being a westerner but I have been able to reconcile the contradictory demands placed on me that resulted in a 'them' and 'us' assumptions. I have begun to generate ways of resisting, resolving uncertainties, conflicts and tensions that had previously seemed to hamper me. I now felt confident I can insert a more generative and generous local voice into my practice in education.

Conclusion

The above narratives of my professional journey are linked. They reveal that my goal as a cross cultural worker increasingly has become one of confronting and contesting how western educators such as myself working in cross cultural contexts can challenge static western assumptions about how education is known and practiced. It also became one of understanding how I could voyage in and write back so that my identity and practice became one of recognising and responding to difference in a manner that collaborated between cross cultural histories and knowledges. I now realise from engaging in this critical reflection as a narrative that my cultural identity cannot be understood as essentialised but more as a contrapuntal arrangement. My identity as a western educator working in cross cultural contexts cannot stand by itself without engaging with an array of opposites if I am to chart a course to serve the needs of my local counterparts on their own terms. My narrative reveals that by engaging and intervening in the conditions which appear to construct the subjectivity of post colonial peoples and insert a more generative and generous local voice into

the practice of education, it is necessary to continually locate a space to withdraw and observe while remaining involved but detached in order to make visible those conditions that continue to construct subjectivity and guide beliefs and practices. This knowledge about the potential for both students and teachers to voyage in and write back has helped in my current position as a teacher educator particularly in relation to international students as together we work towards forging trusting and respectful collaborations , avoiding the binary division of 'us' and 'they'.

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