

## **Community driven curriculum: optimistic research maintaining cultural practices.**

### **Collaborating with East Timorese Cultural Centre and Mary McKillop Institute for East Timorese Studies.**

**Discussion paper presented by Nancy de Almeida Ezequiel and John Maskell  
at AARE, University of Sydney, December 4<sup>th</sup> 2000.**

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Background:

The following paper emerges as a brief story of curriculum development and basic teacher training that is ongoing with members of the East Timorese community of Sydney and for implementation in Australia and Timor.

#### ***Mary McKillop institute of East Timorese Studies (MMIETS)***

Origins: taking text in Tetun to Timor since 1993.

Training teachers in the villages.

At the end of 1999 MMIETS staff estimated that all books and materials delivered over the previous seven years, had been destroyed in the militia destruction. The cost of all that was lost had been in excess of \$250,000.

#### ***Nancys' story: community worker and cultural educator***

Training: languages and interpreting

Migrant Services

Craft work in Brazil

Cultural work in Sydney

The work of the East Timorese Cultural Centre

East Hills Refugees

Emerging Curriculum projects: Oral history as an avenue for curriculum development

#### ***Johns' role as facilitator:***

Skills for Teaching (Timorese community in Sydney)

East Hills refugees

Tetum text into Timor

***Nancys' story: community worker and cultural educator***

Nancy de Almeida Ezequiel: biographical notes.

Timor Pre 1975: I was born in Dili, the capital of East Timor in 1939.

My father Anselmo Bartolomeu de Almeida was from Goa, India and my mother Angelina de Almeida was born in Ermera, East Timor. I have four brothers and four sisters.

Childhood memories in Baura, one of the small regions of Bazartete.

My memories of Ermera and Soibado.

My memories of Singapore and Malaysia.

My first job at the construction of the harbour.

My 2<sup>nd</sup> job at Portuguese shop - Sociedade Agricola Patria e Trabalho Limitada.

My last job in Timor - Banco Nacional Ultramarino.

My first arrival in Darwin: 29/8/75. Mum, one brother, two sisters, one adopted brother and adopted sisters. About 500 people came with us, stayed two weeks there. Given the choice of Perth, Melbourne or Sydney - we chose Sydney because of the harbour.

In Sydney, first worked as a volunteer interpreter for the Timorese employed by the Commonwealth Hostel to work as interpreter for the Welfare Officer Linda Tamakand.

Later, Department of Social Security - Migrant Services 117 Clarence St Sydney

then Migrant Services went back to Immigration. Eight years in this area.

Married Luiz Ezequiel on 22/8/1981

Took leave without pay in 1984 to go to Brazil for one year to meet my in laws.

After one year resigned from work and lived in Brazil for seven years. Became involved with an orphanage in Sao Paolo and made craft work to raise money for the children.

Returned to Australia in 1991.

Met Sr Josephine Mitchell in 1992. Together organised 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of November 12 Dili Massacre at St Marys' Cathedral. Prior to that event my Father passed away on 10 November 1992. Recent great loss - family took part in the event of 13 November 1992.

Established East Timorese Cultural Centre in 1993.

1994 went to Brazil and came back to Australia in 1996.

Toos kiik working with Margaret Dwyer

Volunteer work with the Timorese.

### ***Emerging Curriculum projects:***

After a visit to Timor schools in September, we discussed projects and renegotiated in consideration of importance for the East Timorese Cultural Centre. Nancy (representing the Cultural Centre) suggests three curriculum projects:

1. biography of de Almeida family: to be a bilingual text with information about plants and recipes;
2. developing local history curriculum;
3. continuation of Basic Teaching Skills workshops.

The members of the East Timorese Cultural Centre (ETCC Sydney) are keen to collate information from the older women to strengthen the knowledge of the youth of Timor Lorosae. This may form a history and cultural part of primary school curriculum.

The biography of the Almeida family is progressing - particularly as Nancy wants to finalise the product so that it can be distributed in East Timor next year. This will be a bilingual text with some family history, followed by stories about useful plants and the traditions surrounding the use of such plants.

We meet fortnightly at the Cultural Centre and I tape a two hour interview to gain a depth of biographical information. Due to the lack of texts available in East Timor, Nancy is keen to get her story and plant information published so she can return to East Timor with a positive contribution to the knowledge base.

### ***Johns' role as facilitator:***

This is the story of a Community driven learning cycle - beginning with the question "what needs to be done? What can a teacher educator offer the local community?"

The first request by the community came via the Sisters at the Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies: a Teaching Skills program for the East Timorese Community (Sydney). The intention was to provide teaching skills so that community members living in Sydney would be able to assist in the teaching of children and youth in Timor LoroSae.

One of the tensions for the educators was the position of the Tetun language in the newly emerging nation.

The sisters of Mary McKillop had worked in a clandestine manner for several years - literally smuggling materials and "paying off" Indonesian officials to get texts in Tetun through to the schools in the Catholic system. Some observers have stated that they are also guerilla fighters - or have operated as such throughout the years of the repressive Suharto regime.

*There are many unresolved questions for the emerging education system: teaching of which language and the role of the Church? There will be many questions about the new educational politics of Timor Loro Sae, it is still relatively early days in terms of direction and*

*decision-making. The role of the Catholic educators may be seen as complimentary to the development of the national system. One opinion is that the CNRT is keen to establish a unified education system - free from divisions e.g. religious. Assistance in education will not be discouraged - but protocols for assistance are yet to be clearly stated.*

### **Difficulty of Access to Education:**

Many East Timorese in Sydney are classified as 'asylum seekers' and not Australian citizens. For most it seemed that access to formal teaching qualifications was not feasible in the short term - the asylum seekers were informed that they would be classified as international students, and as such full fees would be required to enter University courses. The few community members eligible to enter University as mature age students were too involved in community life to wait a number of years for a teaching qualification. Their interest was to get some essential teaching skills and to go to Timor to assist in the teaching of the children.

The educators discussed the issue of qualifications at some length. A decision was reached that the Teaching Skills program could, at a latter date, be utilised for some advanced standing towards a formal qualification.

Implementation of the first workshop was delayed due to the aftermath of the referendum in late August 1999.

### ***Teaching Skills Workshops for East Timorese*** (Sydney based)

The group first met with myself as teacher educator in mid September and the first workshop was based on teaching Reading in Tetun. Most of the group knew each other - which is not unusual due to the small size of the Timorese community. The first group of participants were all women, although in later workshops one or two males attended. The women were across the range of ages and had immigrated from a number of regions of Timor Loro Sae. Regional differences were not particularly problematic, however in terms of cultural and linguistic knowledge a number of complexities arose. The workshop was delivered in English and Tetun - the facilitator working with different students who translated the discussion into Tetun as much as was feasible. The intention was to maintain an immersion in Tetun language throughout the workshops.

A total of four workshops were conducted in 1999. Two workshops familiarising students with ***Mai hatene Tetun*** a Teachers Guide written in Tetun by Tess Ward (MMIETS) and reproduced with permission to teach to community members at the East Hills Barracks. Students produced brief stories in Tetun. Approaches to conference writing were discussed and practiced.

The theme of the fourth workshop was *Having fun with Maths*. This workshop presented mathematical concepts in a variety of ways to show the adults low-anxiety approaches to learning Mathematics.

### **Linguistic issues:**

In discussing the issue of teaching in Tetun a range of issues emerged that required some negotiation or mediation. One was the issue of which Tetun to teach. The women who grew up in East Timor had knowledge of over thirty dialects of Tetun - and the ability to discuss the subtle differences of many of these dialects. The other considerable issue was the matter of which language would be adopted in Timor Loro Sae as the national language. Some participants were promoting Portuguese as the politically preferred language - as

many of the older Timorese (perhaps over forty) would have some knowledge of that language. The issue of Bahasa Indonesian was not discussed by the participants, however the United Nations have recently announced that Bahasa will continue to be the language for primary school education (SMH, May 2000).

### **Materials in Tetun:**

The materials used were publications by MMIETS and using the curriculum documents developed by Tess Ward, who edited and wrote several texts and readers. A number of Timorese authors are also employed by Mary McKillop to create the readers and materials that have been distributed in Timor Lorosae for the past six years. Tess Ward Josephine Mitchell, Susan Connelly Manual Viegas and others have been instrumental in setting up the curriculum guidelines for education in Tetun.

### **East Hills Barracks - home for refugees (October to May)**

After the referendum and subsequent upheaval in Timor, the Australian government arranged for refugees to be relocated to three camps - one in Western Australia, one in Victoria and one in New South Wales. The camp in New South Wales was situated in the South Western area of the Greater Sydney region at an army base known as East Hills.

Three of the Skills workshops were held at East Hills Barracks late in 1999.

### **Recent events: Youth Conference on Language**

A Timor LoroSae youth conference held in mid May 2000 focussed on the issue of language. The paper delivered by Father Alves and Luisa Marquez for MMIETS (as part of the Sydney community) was well received - outlining a Tetun program and a possible future for primary children to study and understand Tetun as a written subject in the curriculum.

The CNRT has recently made a statement that Portuguese will be the language of diplomacy and therefore the language of instruction in schools. The youth are making it known that this is not in their best interests - as they have been educated in Bahasa and not Portuguese. Older Timorese have knowledge of the colonisers' language - but those under the age of thirty do not.

Also in the month of May, an international NGO ran a Teacher education workshop for primary school teachers. However there were strong indications that the CNRT were greatly concerned about the training of teachers outside of their control.

### **September 2000 visit to Timor Loro Sae:**

September visit to teachers and schools: the MMIETS team went to re-establish contact with the many schools that had participated in Teacher Education workshops in 1999. Tess Ward had delivered workshops in July 1999. After the destruction last September the need for classroom materials necessitated a visit to deliver replacement texts in Tetum. The new revised materials were authorised by a Timorese priest Fr. Leong (an authority on curriculum within the Catholic education system). All the new books have his stamp of approval. Ironically, the issue of "correct" language is never-ending - with some Timorese teachers questioning the use of certain words and phrases in the revised texts. (Pers.comm Sept 6, 2000). Texts were distributed to over thirty schools in rural areas, and several towns (Ermera, Same, Aileu, Maubese, Ainaro and surrounding districts)

## **Issues of Ideology and Power**

As a non-religious educator with a commitment to empowering I felt uneasy with the tasks initially. Technically MMIETS is a religious organisation and not strictly an NGO. To work with NGOs is to accept their role as providing support for the governments education plans. However the ideology of the NGO may present pedagogical approaches which are more "modern" than some nations would like to offer their citizens. Importing pedagogy from Western based NGOs' will usually mean adopting learner centred curriculum approaches. This will inevitably create tensions between the educators or advisers and the more traditional or conservative nations' Department of Education.

The UN through UNICEF will probably be establishing contracts for international organisations to engage in education and health programs - and that direction will create another set of tensions for the incoming government in late 2001. My previous experience as an educator with NGOs' highlighted the need for control through negotiation - which is often problematic in practice.

## ***History Curriculum***

Recently (ABC News Broadcast 29/9/2000) Dr. Arminda Mias stated that Universities will be opening for students in 2001. History will not be taught in the first year as curriculum needs to be developed". The feasibility of developing family and regional histories to bridge the gap in curriculum development is one likely outcome of the oral history/biography work with families.

## ***Basic Teaching Skills (how to teach small groups)***

The teaching Skills workshops may continue in 2001. The need and desire of Timorese in Sydney to return and teach the young is very prevalent. The Teaching Skills program is intended to provide community members with the confidence to work with their communities in Timor - to assist in teaching Tetum. Some may seek to formalise their profession as community educators and use their work for gaining Recognition for Prior Learning.

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