

The ABC of Reciprocal Learning at the Post Graduate Level: The Co-learning Experience of Sri Lankans at one University in Australia

Phil Fitzsimmons¹

This paper discusses the experience of one cohort of Sri Lankan academics as they undertook a masters programme in an education faculty at one Australian university. As part of World Bank project, several groups of Sri Lankan academics passed through the university where this project took place during the late 1990s. This paper focuses on the second group where the author of this paper took control over their initial research methods class and became the acting director of the programme. Using the reflective journaling processes involved in autoethnography (Ellis 1999), and the hermeneutic processes of interviews arising from van Manen's (1990) 'pedagogical thoughtfulness' this paper details how this group of academics coped with what Green and Lee called (1999), the 'intense engagement of study' involved in the nexus of post-graduate research and study. Already possessing post-graduate degrees, the group undertook this programme with the high degree of focus that would appear to typify overseas students studying in first world countries (Zhao, Kuh and Carinin 2005). However, while initially appearing to have the collective traits of being novices in a realm of gurus (Brown and Atkins 1998), this cohort revealed that not possessing English as a first language or critical thinking were not the basic impediments that are often discussed in academic journals (Cadman 2000, Silverin 2001). This paper details the characteristics that allowed this cohort to negate these first world perceptions entirely and overcome what (Biggs 2001) calls 'cultural colonialism'.

Key words: Cultural colonialism; World bank; Programmes; Post-graduates degree

¹ Centre of Language Education, University of Wollongong, Faculty of Education, Northfields Ave, North Wollongong, 2500, Australia, E-mail: philfitz@uow.edu.au