Negotiating Learning in Distance and Flexible Learning at the University of the South Pacific

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2010
Abstract

Negotiating Learning in Distance and Flexible Learning at the University of the South Pacific

This is a thesis that presents a qualitative mixed method study of 30 students engaged in distance and flexible learning (DFL) courses of study across two campuses of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. The goals of this research were to develop an account of the personal and cultural learning practices that students draw on and use when negotiating learning in their University studies and to understand the ways that University courses including teaching and learning interactions and course materials contribute to student learning and success. At the centre of this study is the concept of learning as negotiated practice.

Data sources included a questionnaire with semi-structured and open-ended questions. Data collection and analysis was guided by the construct of third space theory (Guitierrez, 1999), which provided a frame for considering students’ DFL experiences as acts of negotiation that are situated in nested socio-cultural and socio-historical contexts. Two descriptive campus cases of learning are presented, one for each of the Lautoka and Labasa campuses. Within each case, data from a student group provides background to in-depth learning stories for focus of students at each campus.

Given the socio-cultural, economical, political and the geographical difficulties that DFL students face this study shows that they also face constraints within the University learning contexts that impact the way they construct meaning from their learning experiences. This study draws attention to the need for teaching and learning in DFL that is learner focused and learner centred and that acknowledges learning as a social and cultural undertaking which is constructed as students draw on personal funds of knowledge to navigate unfamiliar terrain.

Findings suggest that universities offering DFL courses would benefit students if the environments for learning constructed in DFL courses were developed in such a way that
provides students with opportunities to draw on their unofficial personal and cultural resources in ways that enhance their ability to learn in the official world of University study. Third space theory is utilised to develop explanations of learning in DFL as a mediated act of negotiation between these official and unofficial spaces that learners inhabit. In the process of engaging and negotiating learning between the DFL learner’s two spaces, a third space or hybrid space is created. This space represents the negotiated solution to solving learning problems.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

........................................

Ledua Meke Kailawadoko-Waqailiti

20th August, 2010
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father the late Viliame Titoko Kailawadoko and my mother the late Kuini Tawavuki Kailawadoko who have shaped my life and inspired me to pursue the best that I can do in this life and to serve God and family for that was their goal in life.

They often used to say:

“Mo qarava na Kalou ena yalodina, nanuma na vetwekani, dou veilomani vakaveitacini ka dou vuli ka cakacaka vagumatua. Dou vakavulici ira na luvemudou enai vakavuvuli oqo.”

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, acknowledge your families both far and near, love one another with brotherly love, work diligently and learn to do more than you can as best as you can. Be sure to pass this on to your children and their generations to come.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I acknowledge the Almighty God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for their blessings upon me that has enabled me to pursue a dream that I never dreamt would eventuate. All Praise and Glory and Honour are His!

I wish to acknowledge Griffith University for offering me the scholarships GUIPRS & GUPRS that have facilitated my PhD studies in the years undertaken for this journey. I offer my sincere gratitude to Dr. Maxine Cooper and Dr. Elizabeth Hirst who initially prepared me for this long and arduous journey. I especially acknowledge Dr. Elizabeth Hirst for the success I had in my Confirmation and in her constant belief that I could follow a dream and reach my destination as an international student in a competitive academic world within Australia. Her goodwill and kindness is what I draw on during upheavals on this journey. I am also thankful to Dr. Annette Woods, and Professor Donna Pendergast for their kind advice and suggestions along the journey.

Last but not least I wish to acknowledge Dr. Kathryn Glasswell and her outstanding contribution to the final accomplishment of this dream. Dr. Glasswell, my principal supervisor from the latter half of the journey till now, guaranteed the fulfilment of a dream that was almost abandoned during the way. Her mentorship has been overwhelming and as well as this she is a highly committed and nurturing professional who has played a pivotal role in my successful completion of the doctoral program at Griffith University. I have been encouraged by her tireless efforts and encouragements and her constant belief that I could make my dreams come true. She has been instrumental in helping me develop the thinking and research skills necessary for earning a PhD. She has been my role model and I sincerely hope that in the future I will be able to provide my own students the kind of excellent mentorship that I have benefitted from under her guidance. I could not have wished for a better expert and intelligent supervisor.

This journey could not have been enjoyable if it weren’t for the many people involved in it. I thank Ms. Jennifer Willis, and the staff of EPS at the Gold Goast Campus and the
DILS group at the Griffith University Gold Coast Campus – Roberta, Sarah, Sally, Steve, Jeff, Nisha, and Anne. We shared ideas, frustrations, confusions, food, laughter and joy together as a group and came through it all cultivating maturity and greater tenacity. I thank Heather my supervisors’ daughter for her expertise in creating and designing the graphics included in this doctoral thesis. In my daily work I was blessed with faithful friends and a group of elders at the Southport Uniting Church, namely the late Reverend Colin Kay and his wife Kathleen, the motherly Maria Moxey, Claire, Jeanette Cheney, Rita, Freda and Betty, Chris and his wife. Their moral and spiritual support kept me going even when my hopes were down. I also wish to acknowledge my friend Kym Rohrs for her generosity and the great support she has given me and my family here in Australia.

Beyond these I have been blessed with a communal family back home in Fiji who provided all the support I needed during my field work there. I acknowledge my nephew Samuela Loiti for sacrificing his time to journey with me on the field study and to my eldest niece Jimaima Kailawadoko for her prayers, goodwill, support and encouragement throughout the journey. I thank my nieces Unaisi Ravula, my namesake Akosita Ledua, Kuini Salusau for transcribing the interview data collected and helping me in my studies. I pay tribute to my uncle Reverend Litia Varo who has been my mentor throughout my journey. I also acknowledge my nephews ‘Makaleka’ and ‘Jojo’ my grandchildren, Pido and Tuwa, Vo, Nina and baby Jima and all my relatives and nieces and nephews who have inspired me to be a role model for all of them. Finally I would like to thank my husband Benedito Waqaili who has been the pillar of strength throughout my life and especially during this PhD journey. I hope to share this dream with him and with all of my family members. My dream has come to an end and another dream has begun, the dream that only God knows where it will go and where it will end.