



Culturally Responsive Lesson Plans by English Language Learners from the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

This paper presents culturally responsive curriculum development for English language learners through the lens of the student and their cultural identity. The research presented in this paper demonstrates the critical nature of developing English language skills through a connection to the cultural identity of the learners. The significance of imbuing cultural identity in the process of learning English is relevant to all stratas of second language curriculum and instruction. This research demonstrates how culturally responsive curriculum can be guided by the needs of the language learner. These lesson plans are an unique example of emic-driven second language acquisition that produce inspired learners.

Key words: Cultural identity, culturally responsive, English language learner, curriculum development, emic multicultural education

Papua New Guinea consists of eastern New Guinea along with New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville, and six hundred small islands and archipelagos. The land area is over 178,000 square miles (462,000 square kilometer), with the mainland accounting for 80 percent . Papua New Guinea is imbued with hundreds of distinct cultures, each with its own distinct identity. As well there are over 900 different languages spoken. These cultures and languages are important as each one contributes to the beautiful and unique labyrinth that is Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea is one of the most diverse countries in the world with 848 different languages spoken (12% of the world's languages), of which 12 have no living speakers remaining. There are hundreds of ethnic groups indigenous to Papua New Guinea, although the largest is the Papuans, whose ancestors arrived in the area tens of thousands of years ago. Another large ethnic

group is the Austronesians, whose ancestors arrived in the region less than 5,000 years ago (Wikipedia).

The diversity of PNG also sets the stage for a need to be able to unify the people of the kaleidoscope of cultures. Tok Ples (Talk of the Place) was a local vernacular that was not useful to communicate with others outside of their immediate village area thus Tok Pisin (Talk Pidgin) emerged as way for PNG nationals to be able to communicate outside of their locality. There is also the language of Hiri Motu. In PNG, Tok Pisin is the creole; Hiri Motu is the pidgin (The Basement Geographer, 2017, retrieved December 2016).

Dasgupta states, “Tok Pisin is most frequently used in Papua New Guinea to communicate, to teach, to command, to pray and express thoughts and feelings. The language has developed over the last 150 years by the people who use it, and is still changing” (2016, p. 1). In essence, the diversity in language and ethnicity has resulted in a common language, i.e. Tok Pisin. What evolved was a Pidgin language, which derives its vocabulary and grammar from speakers of different languages, to provide a common lingua franca. This language came to be known as Tok Pisin. Under the Australian administration of PNG, English was the language used for government and education (Cass, 2000). If a PNG national could become fluent and literate in English, it opened up endless opportunities for professional advancement. The use of English created an elite class while Tok Pisin became a linguistic unifying element for national identity.

Literature Review

Peterson and Coltrane (2003) stated, “linguists and anthropologists have long recognized that the forms and uses of a given language reflect the cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken”(p. 1). In addition, Krasner stated, “linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language (1999). Papua New Guinea offers a unique perspective on this concept in that English is simultaneously a language spoken in PNG and yet is foreign to most PNG nationals. It is foreign because it is an understudy in many ways to Tok Pisin and Tok Ples. There is a bifurcation of its standing; “the ability to speak, read, write and listen to English effectively is essential in PNG in order to have access to success yet English is elusive in many ways and is not mastered by the vast majority of PNG nationals” (Wingi, 2015). Peterson and Coltrane state, “students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs” (2003). To that point, the connection between English and PNG culture is vital for students at the university level if they are to master the English language. Papua New Guinea’s plethora a cultures must be connected to the difficult process of mastering English, if not it will not be intrinsically valued because it will not reflect the identities of the learners. Politzer reminded us that if “we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning” (1959, p. 100-101).

If English is going to be intrinsically valued it must reflect the identities of the English language learners. Language is a social institution, both shaping and shaped by society at large, or in particular the 'cultural niches' (Eleanor Armour-Thomas & Sharon-ann Gopaul-McNicol, 1998). Language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives (Sapir, 1921).

In the instance of Papua New Guinea, the English language many times is viewed as an elitist language. English can no longer be viewed as insubstantial and incongruous to each particular indigenous identity in Papua New Guinea. The lesson plans developed in English by

PNG university students in this paper are examples of the conviction that should always be taken to integrate culture in the process of English language learning in order to make it a meaningful process that reflects not only the apprehension of English but the identities of the learners.

Current research about culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and English language learners is wide-ranging. CRT encourages educators to integrate the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of their diverse English language learners (ELLs) to increase meaningful learning and appeal in the classroom (Johnson & Owen, 2013, p. 2). Guy (1999), “the need to incorporate culture into adult education, calling upon adult educators to reflect upon aspects of their own culture, to learn about their students’ cultures, to critically examine curriculum and materials for stereotypical misrepresentations, and to develop inclusive strategies and instructional methods that represent not only the educator’s but also the learners’ backgrounds and preferences”. In addition, “culturally responsive teaching is distinguished by its emphasis on validating, facilitating, liberating, and empowering minority students by cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success” (Gay, 2000, p. 44). Learning that is grounded in culture is meaningful and representative of the learners identities. Moll and Greenberg (1990) stated that Funds of Knowledge are students’ households, communities, histories, and ways of thinking and learning are rich and full of information that can be tapped into by teachers because English language learners are not empty vessels that have nothing to offer in terms of experiences and background knowledge . Supporting English language learners comes through seeking a culturally responsive and caring mindset, which “is one of those things that most educators agree is important...but they are hard-pressed to characterize it in actual practice” (Gay, 2010, p. 48). The consideration of culture in lesson plan development might seem incomplex but it requires an endemic knowledge of the culture being examined. Culturally responsive lesson plans will only be as good as the cultural expert writing them in order to be used effectively in the classroom. According to Montgomery, culturally responsive teaching includes acknowledging the presence of culturally diverse students in the classroom, helping students find connections among themselves and with the content area, and promoting relevant learning that engages students (Montgomery, 2001).

Developing culturally responsive teaching and adopting culturally linked competencies to English language learning has proven to be challenging; difficulties arise for those English language learners when their cultural identities are not reflected in the curriculum thus making learning English a disjointed process. Culture is key to learning a language; it is key to understanding a language. Teaching that ignores student norms of behavior and communication provokes student resistance, while teaching that is responsive prompts student involvement (Olneck 1995).

Culturally responsive curriculum uses cultural attributes in curricular and instructional planning, instructional processes, classroom organization, motivational strategies and discipline, and assessment (Hanley, 2008). Education that is culturally responsive is endowed with the attributes of the learner. Culture imbued in the realm of English language learning is critical to the totality of successful English language learners. Hanley (2008) states, “culture, in one sense, is a tool or set of tools that are produced through human activity and in turn produce new ways of being, doing and sense making across generations and social contexts”(p. 5).

Fieldwork in Goroka

Methodology

There were two primary aims of the study. First, it was assist in the implementation of improved attitudes toward the English language by university students at the University of Goroka in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. The second aim was to increase the cultural identity of university students during the process of English language advancement. It is the intent of this study to be a model for the incorporation of English language learners' cultural experiences and identity within the context of the language experience itself.

Participants and Site

The participants in this research were Freshman at the University of Goroka. They were identified for the study in the School of Humanities and the Center for Melanesian Studies. Students entering the University of Goroka must take an English diagnostic test in order to assess their English skills. If students score at a "Less than Competent" level, they are placed in an English language skills program in order to increase their language learning. The issue that was continually encountered by the teaching staff was a lack of interest and enthusiasm to engage in English by the students identified as "Less than Competent."

From the "Less than Competent" cohort of students in the Freshman class, which included 67 students in that cohort, 3 participated in this study. The students were asked to research an aspect of their cultural identity and write about it in English. The three were selected based upon their desire to engage in the project and that they represented different tribal backgrounds from Papua New Guinea. Most of the students in the Freshman cohort were from the Eastern Highlands region, yet for the purposes of demonstrating the unique diversity in PNG, 3 students from distinct areas of PNG were selected. The three participants were also selected because they all wanted to be teachers.

There were many one-on-one sessions with each participant to not only hone what it was about their culture that they thought should be put in a lesson plan but also to develop their English language skills and ideas to teach their culture. The final step was to teach them what the lesson plan template that I provided meant and how to use it. The participants filled out the template and we reviewed English grammar. The process of working with these three students was arduous. It was a process that involved numerous sessions discussing what cultural identity signifies and why it is important to teach it to students and share it with the global community.

The following are the lesson plans by the three participants are unique example of culturally responsive curriculum and English language development from Papua New Guinea.

Cultural Heritage Lesson Plan
Subject: Shark Callers of Kontu
By William Bintu*

Background of Lesson Creator: William Bintu is from the Kontu People of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea. William is in his first year of studies at the University of Goroka. He wants to be a teacher. He knows that the ritual of calling sharks is well known by many anthropologists but he wants the ritual to be documented for students to learn about it.

Focus of *Cultural Analysis*: *The Shark Callers of Kontu*

- *Lesson is for elementary school children.*

Learning Target/Objective(s): (What will students know about PNG culture & why is it essential for this cultural item to be documented?)

Students will learn about the significance of calling to the spirits of the shark. It is important to understand that the shark gives us power and confidence. The act of calling to the sharks is a part of village ritual that ties to our ancestors.

Relevance/Rationale: (Why are the outcomes of this lesson important for the preservation of cultural identity? Why are these outcomes essential for future learning? Why is this cultural element of import to the rest of the world?)

The outcomes of this lesson is important to cultural identity because the ritual must be documented and taught to people so it is never lost. It is essential to future learning because our culture will be taught to future generations. The ritual of shark calling is important to the rest of the world because it is a part of culture in Papua New Guinea that is unique in the world.

Formative Assessment Criteria for Success: (How will your students demonstrate that they understand the lesson? What does success on this lesson's outcomes look like?)

Students will create posters about the Shark Callers of Kontu and write a one-page essay about what the ritual means.

Activities/Tasks: (What learning experiences will students engage in?)

- *Students will engage in learning about another culture through listening, creating and presenting their projects about the Shark Callers of Kontu.*

Procedure: (Give a summary of the order of events you will undertake to complete this lesson.)

- *Introduce lesson by passing around my grandfather's shark calling ring that is made of coconut shells. The ring is called a larung. Tell students how calling the sharks to the canoe means one is powerful and has a special spirit.*
- *Show pictures below to show all tools (because I don't have the other tools from my village for students to touch).*



Shark Caller's Tools, 20th century

Kontu culture, Island of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea

Wood, reed, bamboo, coconut and paint

Bowers Museum Purchase courtesy of the Trude Jordan Fund

Bowers Museum #2002.65.1-.3

(<http://bowersmuseum.blogspot.com/2006/05/object-of-week-shark-callers-tools.html>)

- *Students discuss how they think the tools are used to call a shark.*
- *Teacher demonstrates how the rattles make noise but shaking them in a bucket of water. Why would a shark come to that noise in water? It thinks it is a wounded fish. The bamboo stick is also used to slap the water. Give each student a turn at shaking the rattle in the water and slap water with stick.*

- *Show students the picture above with the propeller-looking object (I don't have one to inspect in person right now so students look at picture).*
- *Show students how the propeller has a noose and how shark callers put the noose around the shark's head and twist it.*
- *Students watch the following video on a computer:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTbyViHY3Ls>*
- *Students make their own larung from big macaroni and string to look like a coconut shell larung.*
- *Give students poster paper to draw a picture of the shark caller ritual. Give them markers, colored pencils, and crayons to decorate their poster.*
- *Students write a paragraph about what it means to be a Shark Caller of Kontu.*
- *Students staple the paragraph below their picture.*
- *Each student will present their work to the class.*

What materials and resources are required to teach this lesson?

- *Poster paper, markers, crayons, colored pencils, macaroni (or large beads), string, computer, and pencils.*

**Pseudonym*

Cultural Heritage Lesson Plan
Subject: Asaro Mudmen
By Jerry Mel*

Background of Lesson Creator: Jerry Mel, Asaro village in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea. I am in my first year of studies at the University of Goroka. I want to be a teacher. I participated in Asaro Mudmen cultural presentations to visitors since I was a boy. The mudmen are an important history to know about in the highlands.

Focus of *Cultural Analysis*: *Legend of the Asaro Mudmen*

- *Lesson is for middle and high school students.*

Learning Target/Objective(s): (What will students know about PNG culture & why is it essential for this cultural item to be documented?)

Students will learn about the history of the Asaro Mudmen and create their own masks out of paper mache and perform the ritual of stalking the enemy through a performing arts activity.

Relevance/Rationale: (Why are the outcomes of this lesson important for the preservation of cultural identity? Why are these outcomes essential for future learning? Why is this cultural element of import to the rest of the world?)

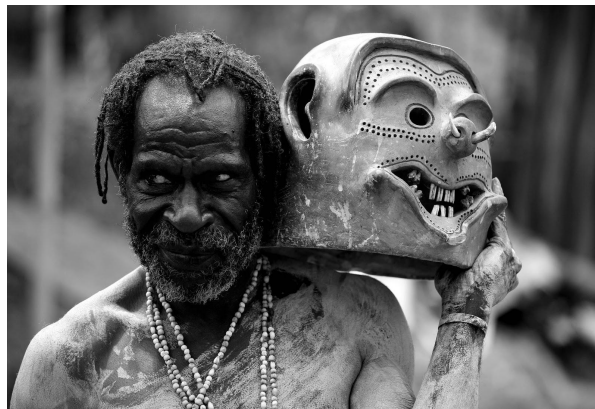
The outcomes of this lesson are important to cultural identity because the culture of the Asaro Mudmen is unique in the world. Students from around the world will learn about this unique culture and increase learning for people to have respect for all cultures. The Asaro Mudmen cultural identity is important to teach students anywhere in the world because they used the environment to survive.

Formative Assessment Criteria for Success: (How will your students demonstrate that they understand the lesson? What does success on this lesson's outcomes look like?)

- *Students will recreate an Asaro Mudmen tribal ritual to demonstrate how the Mudmen defeated their enemies. The students will also study Asaro mud masks and create their own (although out of paper mache). Students will be able to understand Asaro Mudmen through hands-on, active learning.*

Activities/Tasks: (What learning experiences will students engage in?)

- *Students will engage in learning about the Asaro Mudmen through hand-on and performing arts activities. Also, there is a literary part where there is a book presented about the Asaro Mudmen.*



(wikipedia.com)

6. Procedure:

- Groups then present their ideas of why the Mudmen are dressed like that.
- Instructor introduces the legend of the Asaro Mudmen by reading the following: *The Asaro Mudmen* by Dianne McInnes (2012).
- Give graphic organizers to groups to fill-out concept web with six facts about the legend of the Asaro Mudmen. Review together.
- Introduce real Asaro mask to students. Let them touch it and lift it up.

- *Groups come up with ten vocabulary words to describe the Mudmen. Use chalkboard to discuss vocabulary.*
- *Students watch videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pShMm8wymFM>*
- *<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPgfVuyPIx8>*
- *Students will create their own Asaro Mudmen mask using paper mache; Blow up large balloons and dip strips of paper/newspaper in flour and water paste.*
- *Allow a day to dry and add another layer and let dry. Pop balloons and cut eye holes and decorate with shells and sticks, etc.*
- *Students paint masks grey and lett dry.*
- *Students will review video and practice imitating how the Asaro Mudmen move. Some students can use sticks or leaves in hands.*
- *Students will display their masks by wearing grey tops and bottoms and their masks; they will perform the Asaro Mudmen stalking enemy for other students.*

What materials and resources are required to teach this lesson?

- *Computer, strips of paper, flour, water, bones and or other decorations, grey long johns and long sleeve t-shirts.*
- *The Asaro Mudmen by Dianne McInnes (2012)*

Assessment:

Students will be assessed on their masks and their performance of Asaro Mudmen hunting-the-enemy display.

**Pseudonym*

Cultural Heritage Lesson Plan
Subject: Skin Ritual to be a Man
By Kawi-du*

Background of Lesson Creator:

I am Kawi-du. My grandparents came from the Sepik. We love crocodiles. In West Sepik, the boys become men by cutting their skin to look like a crocodile. The crocodile gives strength and power. I have not done this but my father and his ancestors have done it. I hope one day to do this ritual. I want to make a lesson to help kids understand my culture. I think this ritual will always be with my people but I want to share it with the world.

Focus of *Cultural Analysis*: *Crocodile Ritual for Males*

- *Lesson is for secondary school students.*

Learning Target/Objective(s): (What will students know about PNG culture & why is it essential for this cultural item to be documented?)

Students will learn about the history of the Asaro Mudmen and create their own masks out of paper mache and perform the ritual of stalking the enemy through a performing arts activity.

Relevance/Rationale: (Why are the outcomes of this lesson important for the preservation of cultural identity? Why are these outcomes essential for future learning? Why is this cultural element of import to the rest of the world?)

The outcomes of this lesson are important to cultural identity because the ritual of the crocodile is a rite of passage. This ritual shows who we are and our strong relation with the crocodile. The crocodile gives us strength. To understand our skin cutting to look like a crocodile means you understand my people. It is essential to future learning to understand this ritual because it shows our uniqueness in the world. Students can learn about my culture and appreciate it.

Formative Assessment Criteria for Success: (How will your students demonstrate that they understand the lesson? What does success on this lesson's outcomes look like?)

- *Students will create artwork of crocodiles and males with crocodile markings.*
- *Students will present their artwork to class.*

Activities/Tasks: (What learning experiences will students engage in?)

- *Students will create artwork about crocodiles and the men who do the ritual.*
- *Students will present their art to the class.*
- *They have to say 4 things about their art.*

Procedure:

- *Introduce Papua New Guinea on a map of the world. Show students where the Sepik River is.*



- *Show students picture of a Sepik crocodile and ritual body marking:*



*Students will create a word wall of vocabulary that describes a crocodile from the Sepik.
(<https://thetravellust.com/2010>)*

- *Ask students to think of why the man has markings on his skin?*
- *Students work in groups to talk about what the markings mean. Students share ideas.*

- Show video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cu9MDMZeXgI>
- Students use graphic organizer mind map to put down ideas about video.
- Discuss with students when are boys considered men in their culture. Discuss examples. Talk about how skin-cutting is a passage to be a man.
- Students create artwork about crocodiles and ritual.

What materials and resources are required to teach this lesson?

- World map, pictures of Sepik Kaningara men with crocodile scars.
- Art supplies (could be watercolor, pastels, sketch, etc.)
- Computer access to show video of tribe.

Assessment:

- The students will be assessed on their artwork. The artwork should reflect ritual and crocodile. Students will be assessed on their participation

**Pseudonym*

Discussion

Ausubel (1968) proposed that learning must be meaningful and connect to the existing knowledge of the learner. Ausubel's early work demonstrates the necessity of linking learner's knowledge of the world to what is being learned. If teachers do not equate the advancement of learning through the coupling of prior ability and skills of students to objectives achievement will be inconsistent or inadequate. Language and culture are symbiotic. Wang (2011) states "without language, culture would not be available. At the same time, language is influenced and shaped by culture, it reflects culture. Therefore, culture plays a very important part in language teaching, which is widely acknowledged by English teaching circle"(p. 1).

In the case of this research, many times are there is a distinct disconnect for Papua New Guinea nationals between their Tok Ples and Tok Pisin and the English language. This circumstance on a national scale results in students graduating from high school and entering university without maintaining a basic level of mastery in English and worse yet many times are not motivated to improve their English skills. After conversations and interviews with different faculty, staff, and students at the University of Goroka, it was clear that one of the key issues for students' lack of English mastery was a lack of motivation.

The question was how to get the students feel as if there was value in putting the time and effort into increasing their English skills. Initially I was doing work in the Humanities Department to overall the diagnostic test given to Freshman to assess their English skills. It came

about through many conversations with faculty and administration that students came to the university lacking basic English language skills both oral and written and they wanted me to figure out a way to arouse the interests of students to learn and even master the English language. Understanding that students needed to increase their English language skills, I never heard the faculty speak with the students in English. They always used Tok Pisin to communicate with one another except in a formal lesson in the classroom. My office was in the Humanities Department and I observed how the students interacted with each other and with the faculty and English was never used; it was not it required.

As it became clear as to the monumental task of stimulating student interest in learning English, I decided to sit outside of the Humanities Department and try to engage students in English. Most of the students I tried to talk to were interested in telling me about their village or region where they were from. After establishing a baseline level of communication with various students, the main question of lack of motivation to learn English was raised. Students concurred that there were few times in their life when English was a necessity. In order to be successful at the university level students need to be able to speak, read, write, and listen to English yet it is rarely used except in a classroom lecture. All of the students admitted that English seemed like an empty language in that it didn't reflect their who they are. English is learned in order to be successful in a particular field of study, work for the government, or communicate with the outside world (outside of PNG). It was my estimation that there had to be some stimulating element for the students to learn English.

The discussions with students began to focus on the role of culture in their lives. If English is viewed as an empty language then it could be filled with culture and specifically the culture of the students. English language learners should not view English as an empty language that does not reflect their traditions, customs, stories, or knowledge; it should not be a sterile language that is used only for academic or professional purposes. English can be more meaningful if it emulates its learners experiences and lives.

Implications of Study

The fieldwork in Goroka produced student-centered lesson plans about cultural identity or what I call examples of emic method of second language learning. Emic perspective can be defined as an insider's view or the view from a native about their own customs and beliefs. The emic level is the level of perception. Levi-Strauss stated, "people understand actions or words only through the culture they possess (1985, p. 120).

The lesson plans in this research are examples of students increasing their English language skills through cultural identification; they used English to express their cultural identity. They are examples of an innovative manner to activate student motivation to learn English. Their background knowledge and cultural knowledge became central to increasing their English skills. Language learning must be tied to the cultivation of self in order for it to be appealing. Cultural identity is overlooked many times when teaching English as a second language because English is a host language to relate or convey professional and academic information. This research demonstrates the need for teachers to develop pedagogies that correlate to student insights and acumen. It also demonstrates that student ownership in learning a new language connects to its advancement and mastery.

The implications of this research is essential for curriculum development and second language learning. Current research states, "students who are immigrants, refugees,

undocumented, and international enroll in ESL programs but the college or the university system does not have extensive support for these students. Rather the colleges do not reframe the curriculum, programs and the activities to respond to the specific needs of ESL students (Mellow & Heelan, 2008 as cited in Bista, 2011). In addition the culturally responsive lesson plans created in this research could have significance for K-12 English language learners as well. Robertson states, “many cultures have a rich tradition of storytelling that often gets lost in the U.S. with the focus on developing literacy skills. Many of the common stories in cultures have been translated and written in story form, but children also enjoy telling and acting out stories” (Robertson, 2011, p. 1). Rich cultural traditions, stories, and symbolism (to name a few) can be effectively conveyed through English by the students. Learning English doesn’t have to be a vessel filled with everything foreign; it can be an experience in linking culture and language to produce learners who are energized and inspired.

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