EXPERIENCES OF VULNERABILITY IN POVERTY EDUCATION SETTINGS: DEVELOPING REFLEXIVE ETHICAL PRAXIS

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Abstract: In Timor-Leste's education system poverty is widespread and vulnerability is experienced by both students and teachers, entangled in the fragile web of policies and day-to-day challenges. As a teacher and researcher working in high poverty education settings across two contexts in Timor-Leste and Australia, I have been interested in exploring my own situatedness in the policies and discourses that perpetuate and define such realities, as well as how 'vulnerable subjectivities' are enacted, constructed and experienced within poverty education. How can further engagement with poststructural notions of subjectivity and an autoethnographic methodology help develop praxis within poverty education? This paper uses vignettes which describe violence against students to further examine the ideas of vulnerability. In this paper I argue for a greater understanding of praxis for educators and for ethical autoethnography to be explored by more researchers as central to ethical research particularly in education and postcolonial studies.

Keywords: vulnerability, corporal punishment, poverty education, autoethnography, poststructuralism, praxis.

Introduction

In 2015 I began my teaching career as a history and geography teacher in western Sydney. The school is in a part of Australia often referred to in media depictions as "the road to nowhere" or "struggle-street" (Wynhausen, 2006; O'Rourke, Cone, Green, Schist, 2015), referencing the area's low socio-economic status and a variety of social challenges often faced by families and school children. In 2018 I moved to Timor-Leste and began working as an English teacher at a rural Catholic school. I was an English teacher became the Vice-Rector of formation, and a coordinator of a boys' boarding house. Despite being a Catholic school, run by an order of priests, the majority of teachers are paid for by the Government. The school has over fifty staff and six-hundred students from kindergarten to year twelve. I was employed as a volunteer teacher and am paid no more than the local teachers. I ended up in Timor-Leste permanently after first visiting in 2009, I was 16, as a part of a sister-school program. That visit was the catalyst for my career in education yet also formed the site of my own critique as an early-career researcher as I questioned the ethics of sister-school programs and volunteer tourism, including my own journey within it (Blackman, 2017).

I've since felt discomfort towards my work in Timor-Leste however, critique from a poststructural framework should not lead to inaction. There is work to be done in the decolonisation process, which can be achieved through engagement within it. And so I've continued to be implicated within these colonial contexts, at times demonstrating conformity and resistance.

Naming myself a postcolonialist and being an Aboriginal man opens up a paradox between 'I' and the institutions I work in. In my Australian setting I *felt*

more Aboriginal and was able to challenge practices, incorporate Indigenous pedagogies, and support my Aboriginal students. In Timor I *felt* white, as I was there to teach English and support the school's development. That is what was expected of me within a development paradigm by the school leaders and teachers. Suggesting Indigenous ways of learning to my Timorese colleagues didn't align with a quest for modernity and I subsequently put those ideas aside, which through my autoethnographic reflections I've begun to regret. I was in a school in national school system based on a western model of Education. On top of that, it was a Catholic school. Although Catholicism is considered an intrinsic part of the Timorese identity, it has and continues to be a colonising force that detracts from pre-colonial cultural identity. Historically the Church was an international supporter of the Timorese peoples' right to self-determination during the brutal rule of Indonesia, strengthening the hold of Catholicism in Timor-Leste. There are continued tensions between 'I' as a protestant yet 'I' as profoundly aware destructive impact of Christianity on my own peoples and culture.

Trying to make meaning of myself as a teacher and academic, including the aforementioned contradictions of *I,* has emerged as one central focus of my time as an early-career teacher and researcher. I am interested in my relationship with how poverty and vulnerability is experienced by students, teachers, and communities, entangled in the fragile web of policies and day-to-day challenges. How can further engagement with poststructural notions of subjectivity and discourse, and an autoethnographic methodology help develop praxis within sites of poverty education?

This article invites the reader to think about how we can develop research and educational 'praxis' through the lens of untangling how 'vulnerable subjectivities' are enacted, constructed, and

experienced within poverty education. I present a vignette of my time in Timor-Leste and unpack how the discourses in the vignette can be re-mobilised and (de)constructed in a productive way. I'm driven to argue for research and praxis that opens up the already hidden "possibilities for different worlds that might, perhaps, not be so cruel to so many people" (St Pierre and Pillow, 2000, p.8).

Part 1: Theoretical Framing

Language plays a role in constituting worlds, and acting as a discursive practice on bodies. Language isn't the main focus of this discussion, but it is worth noting my entanglement within them. To better become embedded in Timor life, becoming fluent in the local language was an obvious channel to enrich my engagement, life, work, and understanding of culture. The two national languages are Portuguese and Tetun, with Bahasa Indonesian and English defined as working languages in the constitution. It was entirely necessary for me to quickly learn Tetun. This allowed for the forging of better relationships, and an ability to discuss and debate my subjectivities in collaboration with colleagues.

Subjectivity recognises the role discourse and regimes of truth play in the formation and desires of bodies as subjects. A poststructural understanding of subjectivity comes from recognising discourses as "practices which systematically form the objects about which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p.49). Subjectivity is a continuous process whereby we are discursively constituted by that which is around us and we begin to embody particular subjectivities in response to those discourses. Often in education, policies manifest as discursive practices that construct and order bodies, such as those of 'good teachers' or students, or conversely 'bad', are being worked on us whilst we also

try to become those discourses like a 'good teacher'. Discourses work on us while we try to become – or are positioned by others as 'good teachers' or students. A student's perceived willingness to engage in the set curriculum and lessons often positions them in one way or another, such as being an engaged/disengaged learner, the latter making them vulnerable to disciplinary practices. So "discourse comes to appear circular: discursive practices constitute discourse at the same time as being constituted by discourses" (Youdell, 2006, p.35). When we do come to untangle subjectivities and critique them, it is not to transcend them but to massage and better recognise them. In turn, this can also allow for once hidden possibilities of change and difference to emerge.

Students are often described by teachers and policies through identity markers based on race, class, language background, sexuality and so on (Youdell, 2006). These markers are often deficit, structured, and binary rather than understood as flexible, fluid, or changeable. Instead of using these identity markers, vulnerability emerged through my research. Vulnerability could be attached to experiences and social interactions rather than defining bodies with identity markers. Vulnerability provided an opportunity to describe and analyse a moment, encounter, relation or the ways a body is subjugated. This opportunity I began to explore through an autoethnographic methodology. Researching moments through a lens of vulnerability explores not the bodies as fixed individuals but rather the relations and experiences that emerge in the dynamic space of the classroom. As Butler says "vulnerability is not a subjective disposition. Rather it characterises a relation to a field of objects, forces, and possessions that impinges on or affect us in some way" (Butler, 2016, p.25). In this paper, I am observing and analysing a social relation where vulnerability is

relational, fluid, and productive in acting on the bodies of teachers, students, and myself as part of the dynamic field of the classroom.

Vulnerability is used across disciplines, with fixed definitions of it often focusing on characteristics of harm, defenselessness, or weakness. Thus, vulnerability as a discourse attached to groups of people lays a foundation for allowing policies or actions to be implemented to protect these identities (Misztal, 2011). It is understood to be a part of our common humanity and is invariably linked to being at risk, and thus requires the need (from the non-vulnerable) to minimise or protect humanity from that risk. A critical understanding of vulnerability needs to consider power relations, governmentality, and discourses of help and aid that impact on particular subjects in particular contexts and moments. In this reading of vulnerability, it is "a specific label that can be deployed to justify targeted actions towards/against specific groups of people" (Van Loon in Misztal, 2011, p.35).

However, I was drawn to the idea of vulnerability through Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay's (2016) exploration of the interrelated nature of vulnerability and resistance, where vulnerability is an experience that may form one of the conditions that is needed to demonstrate resistance. In the previous understandings of vulnerability, vulnerability implies a need for the powerful to take on paternalistic forms of power. This includes neocolonial responses through, for example aid, in the Pacific and elsewhere. Butler argues that if we understand vulnerability as a social relation, rather than an identity, then "we make (a) a general claim according to which vulnerability ought to be understood as relational and social and (b) a very specific claim to which it always appears in the context of specific social and historical relations that call to be analysed concretely" (2016, p.16). Page explains that vulnerability "is productive (rather than being positive

or negative): it is doing something and exists in relation to the bodies, communities and contexts in which vulnerability is lived with" (2017, p.282). Butler, et. al. (2016) argues that vulnerability is localised and framed by "micro level details of lives" (p.282). If vulnerability is explored as a context specific social relation, we can move the narrative beyond generalising descriptors of people's lives and bodies, towards analysis of specific experiences, as an ethically aware form of research and praxis.

Praxis can be illustrated as actions and practices of experimentation rather than philosophical speculation. Expanding on the question of what is praxis in education, Kemmis (2012) provides an extensive discussion, from which I take the following key points. Praxis is: history-making action, in the good interest of those involved and of human kind, which is morally committed and tradition informed, with a long-term perspective on the work we educators do. A methodology of autoethnography provides a site then to engage in reflexive and (de)constructive dialogue to influence my praxis for the good interest of those involved (Blackman, 2017).

An integral part of praxis is reflexivity, and this has manifested as an autoethnographic methodology to much of my research and conduct as a teacher. In the interest of "challenging the arrogant assumptions of empowerment and the authority of knowledge" (Parkes, Gore and Elsworth, 2010 p.172), I argue for a deeper understanding and use of critical autoethnography in research, as presented through my later vignette and analysis. Turning the gaze inwards, back on the author, as I witness and am a part of the social interactions I analyse, allows the reader to experience a more robust, embodied, and emotional story. It allows for a more equipped ablity to critique and deconstruct subjects within the research context.

Autoethnography acts as "a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts." (Spry, 2001, p.710). It is not narrative which looks to disclose the truths of an "I", or present lived experiences as true, real and fixed. In my own research and in this piece, I have chosen to use vignettes - evocative, emotional descriptions of moments - which help frame broader research ideas and questions. Evocative autoethnographic writings and analysis can frame and give narrative form to a broader research discussion. Autoethnography entails a process of focusing in on the descriptive detail and then zooming out to apply the analysis to a broader context (Chang, 2008). Autoethnography invites researchers to place personal narrative at the front and center of our thought/research and in doing so destabilising the "I" who is researching the "other".

Part 2: Vignette and discussion

I worked a rural Catholic school on the southern coast of Timor-Leste. The community families are primarily subsidence farmers who grow corn and raise animals. It takes around four hours by motorbike to reach the village from the capital Dili and two hours to the district's 'capital city'. The school population is made up of a majority of students from the village and surrounding area, as well as students from the boys' and girls' boarding houses. When the school was burnt down in 1999 by Indonesian militia, the newly appointed rector created relationships with communities in Australia to support the rebuilding of the school. My school (when I was a student) became involved in 2007.

It's 7:50am, I'm late, and I ride through the front gates of school, remembering then to lower my motorbike stand on a rock so it doesn't fall in the mud again. There are only a handful of motorbikes around, yet a sea of white and blue uniforms as students stroll off to class. Why hurry? There aren't many teachers here yet. Others continue to sweep the concrete and gather leaves from the dirt. I walk to my class, already sweating, and notice some students lined up in the quad waiting to be punished by a young teacher wielding a stick. It's a piece of flexible cane. They were probably late, like me, or aren't wearing the complete school uniform. Their heads are bowed as the line moves slowly, one-by-one, like people solemnly waiting to receive holy communion in Mass. One by one I hear the cane swing through the air, making contact with the back of their legs. Swoosh - Whack! Swoosh - Whack! At least they're not kneeling for the whack on the hands today.

I continue to walk, still sweating, and the library comes into view. DAMN IT! It's locked and I need the textbooks for my year 11 lesson now. Frustrated, I continue to my class, trying to think on-the-spot of what I'm going to teach in the absence of the textbooks.

How does this vignette help understand the ideas I'd like to explore? Questions framed by 'how' "open up and enable us to explore the discourses at play in whatever context we are interested in." (Petersen, 2015, p.68). In this line of thinking, I ask how are the discourses in my vignette created and maintained? How can they be re-mobilised and (de)constructed in a

productive way? How are bodies constructed, constituted and enacted as vulnerable? Running across each of these questions is vulnerability, as a subjectivity and as an expression. The following analysis of the emerging themes, as I see them, is an invitation for the reader to continue to think back to the 'how' questions in order to explore these discourses in other familiar contexts.

Why hurry? There aren't many teachers here.

Teacher lateness and teacher absenteeism are common challenges across schools in Timor-Leste. This is not an individual problem but rather a symptom of the greater illnesses that plague education in Timor-Leste. Teacher professionalism and their absences should be understood as a structural and social phenomenon rather than an individual one. This includes limited teacher training, social discourses about the status of teachers, resourcing, and a lack of opportunities for teachers to express their professionalism together (see Burns, 2017). There are also the day-to day challenges faced by the teaching profession of home responsibilities, travel distances, a lack of support mechanisms and resources, and the cultural flexibility of time or "Timor-time". This new idea of time was initially a site of enormous tension for me, as I didn't understand it and was constantly frustrated by teachers who were always late to school or school being cancelled for a cultural ceremony. I held the same views as "Jane's earlier idea of professionalism had suggested a valorisation of productive time also typical of an industrial, industrious modernity" (2009, p.148). Balancing the need to use the school day effectively whilst respecting flexible definitions of time remains a difficult balancing act. Are there possibilities for Governments and schools to enact policies that massage this tension

between what a western system of education (as has been copied and inserted into Timor-Leste and many less industrialised countries) and local understandings of time? Against this web of issues, including notions of "Timor-time", and the result of poor teacher attendance, students are expected to be on-time and are regularly punished for being late - as many of the students in the story are being physically published for just that: not respecting the 7:45am start time.

The students lined up waiting to be punished by a young teacher wielding a stick.

In this moment we can focus on the bodies, space, and objects. Firstly, I would struggle to get my Australian classes to wait in a line to enter the classroom. To see students passively waiting in a perfect line to be punished, is indicative of how the students are both constructed as vulnerable (victims of corporal punishment) and actively enacting their vulnerability (waiting in an orderly way and without protest). To react with emotional condemnation, which is how I initially did (oh how disgusting!) prevents trying to understand more critically how violence is used in schools and how violence could be (de)constructed in a manner that opens new violence-free possibilities. In this context, and perhaps others, violence is not only an act on vulnerable peoples, but also an expression of vulnerability, in this case an act on students by a teacher who is a body experiencing vulnerability, as I'll elaborate on later.

Could the students resist? What if they didn't line up so willingly? Much like it is possible to imagine (and often see) university students protesting - harnessing vulnerability (their cause) and deliberate exposure to harm (resistance) such as police violence or university sanctions - so too could the school students decide enough is enough and not wait in a line, potentially

exposing them to greater harm. Yet it would be harm that comes from their resistance not their subjectivity as late / or bad. How could the students better be supported, if at all, to resist corporal punishment? There is a broader conversation to be had about how students can and should be supported to question, understand, and resist the subjectivities through which they are constituted by others and the discourses that both dominate and construct their lives.

Next let's turn to the space (quadrangle) and the object (a stick). The students are lined up in the school quadrangle, very public, as others go about their school morning. The teacher is holding a stick, a piece of flexible cane. The space is public, the middle of the school where all classrooms look onto and open up to. It is where students line up every morning to listen to school information, sing the national anthem, and pray. It is also their main area for rest between classes. Yet it is also frequently a site of public discipline. How is the space being used discursively in the sense of establishing norms, expectations and realities? Objects and space play crucial performative work on bodies and in creating norms (Taylor, 2013). The quad is the centre of many schools, a feature of mass education infrastructural design. As a physical space it represents the centre of the schooling institution. And so for students to witness/experience violence within that space normalises violence as a part of the mass schooling institution. Petersen articulates that "institutions, material objects, social behaviours or spatial arrangements, for example, are discursive in the sense that they are entangled in historically and culturally contingent power/knowledge relations" (2015, p.64) and we see that at play in this vignette. The quadrangle is entangled in the historical power relation of mass education and the stick acts, much like the cane previously in Australia and other western

countries, as an implement that aids social order through a clear student/teacher hierarchy of domination and subordination. So perhaps in many ways the space has not allowed for the students to resist, but it is the space, not just the teacher, that demands order and the students to wait for their corporal punishment.

Swoosh, Whack!

The teacher hitting the students is enforcing Ministry of Education and school rules on student attendance and uniforms. The teacher *is* carrying out their professional obligation. Violence as a discipline is quick, at least temporarily *effective*, and most likely their experience when they were once a student under Indonesian colonial rule. In the absence of classroom management training (or a limited amount), corporal punishment presents itself as "the only way" or "what they respond to", phrases often expressed to me. In a UNICEF report commissioned by the Ministry of Education in Timor-Leste and the Commission on the Rights of the Child, 71% of surveyed students reported being victim to violence by a teacher at school in the previous 12 months (Hamilton, Yarrow and Raoof, 2016). This number was as high as 84% in research conducted by a local NGO *Ba Futuru* (Ba Futuru, 2013). Yet violence against students is not solely used as a punishment for breaking the rules. It is an expression of power (and I argue vulnerability) that organises bodies into a social order or hierarchy. Ordered violence, as witnessed in this vignette, is interpreted as having power and control in a very public and arguably brutal way that presents the school-hierarchy as stable and natural, despite its fragility. In other practices, such as a teacher screaming and being violent angrily (a tantrum), demonstrates weakness and lack of control.

In some contexts, if teachers are without an array of teaching and classroom management strategies, strict discipline can become the default way teachers 'do their job' and express their *professionalism* within the school-hierarchy, despite a level of vulnerability in not being confident educators. A teacher who is not prepared to teach might focus their attention on discipline problems - lining up, silence, uniform, hats off - more than one who is prepared to focus on teaching. Discipline applied to issues such as these provides a facade of order and professionalism. It can hide a level of vulnerability, teachers not being confident in their pedagogy or understanding what their roles are. Interpreting the teacher as also vulnerable in this moment signals my desire to open up possibilities for different interpretations. In one reading of the situation, a lack of training as a factor in using violence in contrast to the risk of criminal prosecution for using violence may render the subject as vulnerable in any moment of using violence as discipline. Or is it unreasonable to view a 'lack of confidence' in their craft as rendering them vulnerable? Perhaps their conformity to a system which normalises acts of violence – with emphasise placed on the gap between rhetoric of the state and *cultural* expectations – may demonstrate complacency and subordination within a hegemonic oppressive system. With alleviating student vulnerability still at the forefront, does our gaze need to be broadened towards the conditions of subjectification and the entrapment experienced by teachers as actors within this type of system? How can widening our understanding of vulnerability in poverty education towards teachers as also experiencing vulnerable moments, rather than evoking blame or condemnation, create new conditions for change?

The teacher is a relational body, constructed by policies, cultures, experiences, and entangled in a poorly resourced and fragile system of education. They are upholding/enacting community views that violence is okay as a form of punishment and means of control. Simultaneously, they are rejecting new rhetoric such as "zero tolerance" to violence in schools as first stated in 2008 (Ba Futuru, 2013) and reaffirmed in the Ministry of Education guidelines on technical and teaching and learning methodology resource in 2015 (Hamilton et. al., 2016). There are a number of reasons why there is a slippage between policy and what is happening in practice, namely the lack of alternative behaviour management strategies provided and no general sense that violence is undesirable or socially unacceptable as a form of discipline against children (Hamilton et. al., 2016).

Casually in staff room coffee chats I tried to interrogate with colleagues ideas such as how a breach of some rules, such as students wearing the wrong colour socks, impacts their learning. "How is your punishment linked to their behaviour and how does it help them correct their behaviour?". Questions like this help unpack and separate discourses of schooling, with the strong focus on discipline and order, from education which is the focus on teaching and learning. (De)constructing educating as more important than schooling reduces the emphasis on *problems* such as incorrect uniform and removes the need to use time for punishing rule-breakers. To replace time that otherwise would have been used focusing on these minuscule problems with teaching and learning requires resources, both material and pedagogical, which are still lacking (Shah 2014, Burns 2017).

Back in Australia, for a moment. . .

The school where I first taught was in a western Sydney low socio-economic community. The school had around 400 students from a wide diversity of ethnic backgrounds including a majority of Polynesian and Aboriginal students. I don't want to reduce the lives of my students and their communities by providing a set of government statistics – that would be counter to the type of research I arguments I've made already. In detailing the contextual challenges; crime was high including domestic violence, attendance was a problem for many students, and poverty a reality for many families. Despite this, the community was close, religious, and supportive of one another. My students actively took pride in where they were from, and many recognised the role they had in pushing back against wider Australian perceptions of their suburbs.

> "You know what? I think it's time I ring your mum and discuss how you are stopping yourself and everyone else from learning! You clearly aren't interested in listening to me", I yelled across the classroom at a student.
> "Aw come on sir! Don't be a dog sir! You know I'll get a hiding (beating) sir!", he whined back at me, elongating each 'sir' .
> I thought about his response, very respectful with his repetition of 'sir'. It's probably very likely he will get hit if I ring home, I suppose.
> "Well maybe you should remember that the next time you want to disrupt everyone else's learning and your own. Don't push me again – I will ring your Mum", I smugly remarked as I got ready to return to

teaching the lesson without his disruptions hopefully.

I was a beginning teacher invoking fear by outsourcing violence to a parent as a means of classroom management. A threat to phone home, with the knowledge their parents may use violence as a punishment, highlights within an Australian context the same challenges I've described in relation to my experience in Timor-Leste. In that moment, I was frustrated and looking for a quick *solution* to a student's challenging behaviour. Perhaps if I had more experience behind me it wouldn't have been how I managed situations like this in my earliest years of teaching. Yet, phoning home about behaviour problems is a common practice of teaching in Australia, under the descriptors of quality teaching as it appears to involve parents and families in their child's learning and development.

Back to Timor . . .
The library is locked and I need textbooks!

The Timor-Leste national curriculum (and national exams in years 9 and 12) focus on content rather than skills. A syllabus is available, however in all my time in Timor-Leste I've never seen it. In the Australian context there is a syllabus, curriculum and then textbook / student workbook resources. In Timor-Leste these three items are all rolled into one nationally provided book, which for primary school includes a lesson by lesson guide. And so access to textbooks is essential. The textbooks for grades 10 to 12 have been provided, and this is what is written on each book through the *"Cooperação entre o Ministério da Educação de Timor-Leste, o instituto Português de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento (IPAD), a Fundação Calouste*

Gulbenkian e a Universidade de Aveiro" (Cooperation between the Ministry of Education of Timor-Leste, the Portuguese Institute for Development Support (IPAD), the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the University of Aveiro). Simply; the textbooks have been provided through Portuguese institutions. Their source invites us to question their relevance. The lower year textbooks were written specifically for the Timor context and use a mixture of the two official languages (and language-based subjects like English). The grade 10 to 12 English textbooks were difficult for even me to follow and teach due to being content heavy and culturally irrelevant. There are entire chapters that are Eurocentric and include texts for students to read on ballet, Cinderella, and street performers; all foreign to students in Timor-Leste.

The books being locked away can represent two challenges to teaching and learning in Timorese schools: No resources or not enough resources so the limited supplies are locked away and protected; and a lack of understanding on how to use the resource. The scarcity of resources and schools not knowing when they may receive more, can lead to books being on site but not available for use. We can consider if the source of the texts and their contextual relevance plays a role in determining whether or not teachers access them.

These challenges emerge as constant obstacle for teachers and can relate to my first point about teacher absence and my third point about a focus on discipline. The material reality of no or limited resources feeds a discourse that "we can't teach (well) because we have no access to resources". Shah's research discovered that "many teachers cited practical constraints as a reason for the dissonance between their knowledge of better practices, and what they were able to implement" (Shah, 2014. p.67). When delivering professional learning sessions about pedagogy, many times I was met with comments like "that might work

in Australia, but here we have no resources". This comment even appeared when the activities I presented were pedagogical tools that only require set subject content and a chalkboard. There may be both ideological as well as technical barriers to developing pedagogy. However, "significant alterations to systems of teaching and learning must engage with local values and beliefs" (Brown in Shah, 2014 p.62). Certainly in moments I experienced, teachers expressed some resentment that their values and beliefs have not been a part of curriculum design. The country continues to build an education system that is tugged and pulled in different directions by international actors and donors, trying to have the most influence over shaping the system. (Burns, 2017).

The locked library irritated me because now I needed to think on-the-go about what to do with my class. For me this was a nuisance rather than problem that can't be resolved, just like when the internet doesn't work in Australia. I can have a class discussion, use my daily planner, do some group work, revise previous material and so on. However, if a teacher's pedagogical toolbox consists of translating and copying from the textbook; without it you are exposed and vulnerable. This exposes a link between poverty and vulnerability. The connection is materialized as the emergence of a correlation between limited resourcing (both material and systemic support) and the moments of vulnerability that both actors experience – students and teachers – as poverty remains entrenched. Whereby poverty can be understood not only as material lack but also subordination within a neocolonial culturally irrelevant system of education.

The Vignette and me

Vignettes in research are presented as stories in the hope they create "a space of dialogue, debate, and change" (Holman Jones, 2005, p.764) beyond the forms and conventions of academic writing. They are stories of particular moments situated within specific times and places. They may be reconstructed from notes or journal entries recorded at the time of the experience, memories, and reflections that aim to bring the moment to life in embodied, relational, and emotional detail. In my approved ethics application for my PhD research, I described using autoethnographic vignettes as focusing on micro details with the potential to be expanded into different contexts, resonate with a collective, and in some circumstances influence macro analysis and policy change. Thus, autoethnography must be a "deconstructive textual practice that represents and troubles the self at the same time" (Gannon, 2006, p.477).

The "I" of my vignettes is a body, my body, that is constrained, constructed, and enacted through discourses in spatial entanglements. I am in a Timorese Catholic school, but I am not Timorese or Catholic. I am a Vice-Rector responsible for teacher formation, yet still early in my career. I am an English teacher and native English speaker. I am a foreigner from a developed country, in a less industrialised country to participate in discourses of development. I am an Aboriginal Australian seen simply as a white Australian in Timor-Leste. I am a witness to violence, and a perpetrator of it. I am new and learning, yet constantly asked to advise and lead. This web of subjectivities is presented to provide different framings of "I" in the vignettes.

Emphasis on different subjectivities can provide a different reading of each story. Why did the I as Vice-

Rector not intervene and stop the breach of Government policy on violence against children? How was the I as a foreigner becoming a part of the norm, such as being late to school? What expectations could the other bodies within the moment have had of me? did the students think I would intervene?

I not only witnessed that moment but was a part of it, as much as a foreigner can be. The I was a late teacher without access to resources unfazed in the moment by violence against students and the absence of other teachers. These moments represent relations and experiences rather than individual identities. It is not merely a description of an individual teacher, specific students, an individual school without resources. There is no universality or singularity in the bodies and experiences, rather the vignette is an expression that may resonate with other bodies and actors operating within and against the maelstrom of poverty education. The vignette is inspired by a specific place and time yet, as I argued in my ethics process, undergoes a process of fictionalising and creating composites. It comes from a "fractured and fragmented subject position" (Gannon, 2006, p. 475) and aims to provide "an insight into a singular experience that resonates with some collected tales" (Appleby, 2009. p. 139).

This discussion of the "I" - who is implicated and complicit at the same time as seen to be part of the solution- is needed across research that is situated within similar contexts, such as education, postcolonial studies, and international development studies. I argue there is value added by both extending and troubling understandings of the 'I' in a way that enriches the analysis of praxis. We are a part of our/the realities we research, especially if we work within them not as academics only but as actors embedded in the context of our research, like a teacher (in my experience). The personal becomes incorporated

into research to allow the subjectivities of the researcher to be represented and troubled so that they are not granted, "absolute authority for representing 'the other' of the research" (Gannon, 2006 p. 475). The task becomes an act of researching and writing from positions that are always already compromised and fractured to make subjectivities relational, flexible, and visible.

Conclusion

So what did I do? How did I respond in praxis to the vignette, the violence against students, aside from analysing it in this article? Autoethnography at worst can be narcissistic, rather than productive (Pathak, 2010) and I do not want to fall into that category. Instead of writing a conclusion that summarises the article and tries to tie it up in a neat package, I am going to return to my story - which is not finished nor packaged nicely. It continues to evolve as I now no longer work in either sites, but at a distance from the catholic school. I continue to provide my colleagues there with support in an evolving capacity from Dili, where I now work. Being a volunteer for two years in the remote community impacted my health and caused personal financial debt. I continue to act as a conduit between various donors. Manage some infrastructure projects, provide professional learning and support as a visiting colleague, and maintain a strong connection with the boarding houses and student alumni association.

When I was still working on-site, I set out to work on reducing violence against students by promoting professional learning for teachers in my capacity as Vice-Rector of formation. This position of 'power' was problematic in many respects. Taking on a leadership position as an outsider within a short period of time presented hurdles. More was achieved when I stepped

down from that role, instead taking on a position of support rather than leadership. However, as Vice-Rector and afterwards, we collaboratively developed policies, provided professional learning opportunities run by a Timorese NGO, established classroom observations and group mentoring. Resources were developed (in Tetun) in collaboration with my teaching peers, the NGO *Ba Futuru, and* influenced by government policy. None of the documents or professional learning activities we created called out violence specifically, but rather discuss positive pedagogy, positive discipline, and supporting teachers to manage their workload. Trying to shift the discourse away from anything that may come across as a judgment from an outsider was a conscious decision made in trying to move forward working together with the school community. The Government rhetoric of "Zero Tolerance to violence in schools" doesn't carry with it support for teachers to do things differently and feel empowered in their profession. Nor does it acknowledge the ideological debate needed to advance the belief that violence as a means of punishment is 'bad'. Attempts to change decades of colonial educational practices that are rooted in structural deficiencies won't happen overnight. I of course recognise Catholicism as a colonising force, in many respects, however it has provided a theoretical/theological framework for bringing about an ideological awakening and practical changes. It was through my own critical reflexivity that I turned to thinking of what values/discourses am I not seeing or blind to in my pursuit of reducing violence. I turned to Catholicism. Positive pedagogy and a discipline framework was implemented based on theological pillars of compassion, care, and peace. It is also in a timely way tied to the global focus of the Church on the protection of the child. The intrinsic link between Catholicism and a Timorese identity allowed for the

pursuit of positive teaching practices that come from within an existing belief system; not an imposition of my own. My role became a facilitator between consulting on theology and translating that to how teachers can teach and reorientate their discipline focus to create a positive classroom. This was more effective than influencing policy as a part of the leadership team. My praxis as the practice of experimentation, informed by tradition and morally focused, has long-lasting pedagogical impacts; violence continues to disappear and the void its absence leaves is filled with a moral commitment to the some tenets of Catholicism. Despite the source, they are values of humanity.

It has been in returning to my vignettes that I've been able to critically reflect on my micro context to try and implement changes that are responsive and respectful to the setting. A systematic and structured use of autoethnograhy acted as a source of evolving evidence to constantly engage with my own implicatedness as an actor in a play which isn't mine. I continue to engage with autoethnography because I continue to exist and work within sites that cause me unease; including the ever-present risk that I conform or become non-cognisant to my own implicatedness and subjectivities. Autoethnography does not erase such a risk but opens an avenue to remain critically reflexive of 'I' within the settings in which I work. My emerging engagement with autoethnography continues to allow for transformative praxis in the link between lived and emerging experiences and refinement of my pedagogy and roles within education. Through understanding the social relations we work in/with through an autoethnographic praxis, as well as reflecting on the different way I myself have used a form of violence as classroom management, has allowed me to better understand the issues as structural. It opened up possibilities to have

meaningful conversations with teachers out of solidarity and support, not paternalistic help. I hope through this narrative and discussion, the reader is able to pose similar questions to their own specific contexts and better understand the relations that exist between vulnerable bodies and yourself as an educator or researcher.

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