

EXPERIENCES OF PIVOTING AN IN-COUNTRY TEACHING EXPERIENCE TO AN ONLINE CULTURAL AND LITERACY EXCHANGE



Presentation to the 2021 ACU and DePaul University Online Conference on Community Engagement and Service-Learning - Pandemic, Pivots and Potentials

MELLITA JONES

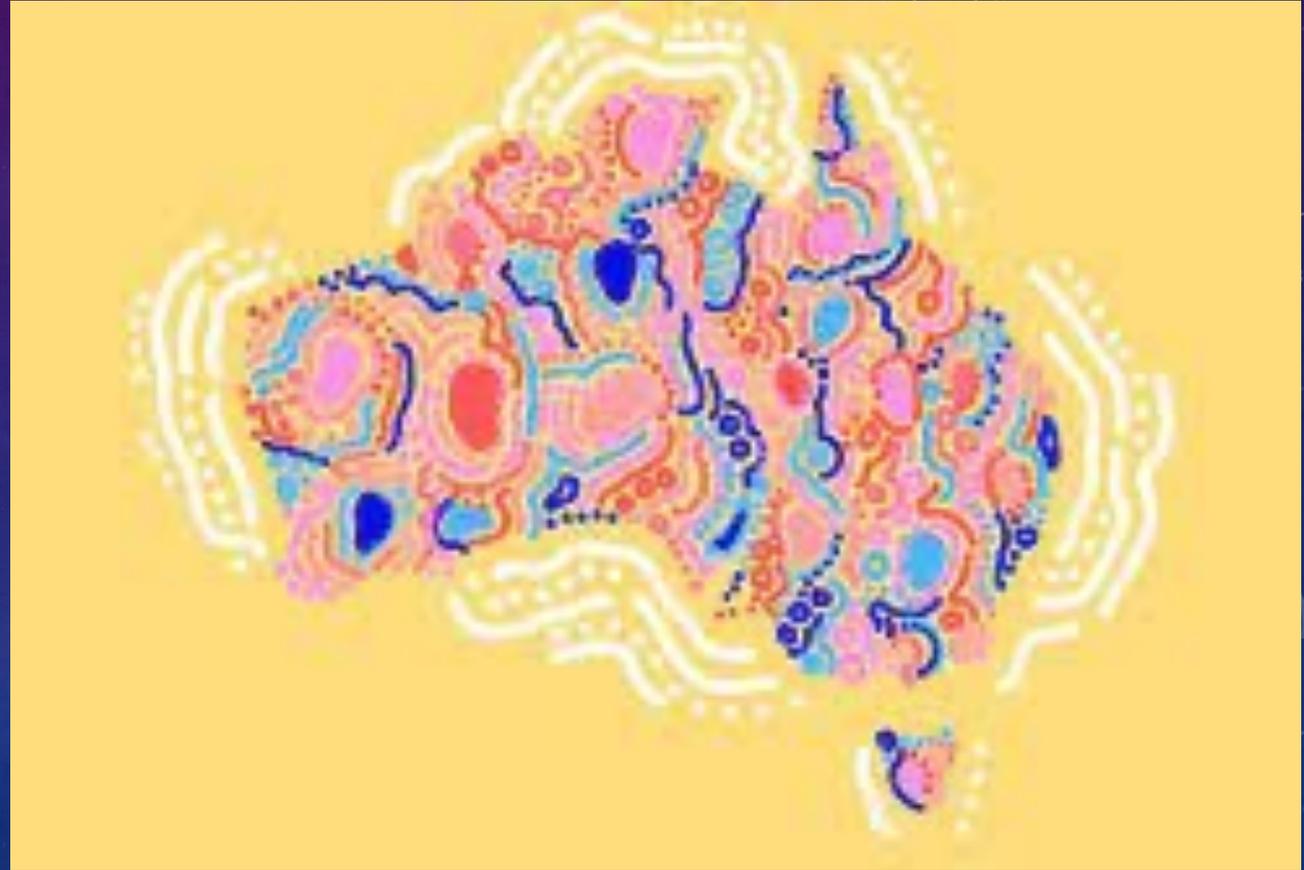
RENATA CINELLI

MARY GALLAGHER

LILY-CLAIRE DEENMAMODE

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

- ACU is built on lands, never ceded, belonging to:
 - ❖ Ngunnawal people (Canberra)
 - ❖ Wathaurong people (Ballarat)
 - ❖ Wurundjeri people (Melbourne)
 - ❖ Turrabul and Jaggera people (Brisbane)
 - ❖ Cammeraygal people (North Sydney)
 - ❖ Wangal people (Strathfield)
- Each of these nations, and others on whose land we might be located in this moment, has faithfully cared for country for thousands of years.
- We respectfully acknowledge Elders of these lands, past, present, and future, and remember that they have passed on their wisdom to us in various ways.
- Let us hold this in trust as we work and serve our community.



Artwork by Arkie Barton

PROGRAM STAFF



Mellita Jones (Ballarat)
13 years experience in partnership



Mary Gallagher (Canberra)
5 years experience in the partnership



Renata Cinelli (Strathfield)
8 years experience in the partnership



Lily-Claire Deenmamode (Melbourne)
New to our partnership this year



BACKGROUND

13-year partnership with Bishop Epalle Catholic School (BECS), Honiara, Solomon Islands

Pre-COVID, groups of PSTs taught at BECS for 1 month

Australian Federal government New Colombo Plan funding supported PST involvement since 2016

NCP funding was secured for 3 years when COVID hit

Government encouraged a pivot to some sort of virtual program

OUR PIVOT

- NCP variation agreement enabled the purchase of laptops and associated equipment and an internet connection to be installed at the school to support an online exchange.
- We run four 90 min sessions a week with:
 - 59 ACU PSTs from Bachelor of Education courses
 - 79 Grade 6 children from BECS (three sessions)
 - 17 BECS Primary Division teachers (one session)
- The focus of the sessions is on cultural and language exchange through the context of a literacy learning program.



Charlwis Raphael

September 6 at 4:08 PM · 🌐

Delivery of BEPS Lab equipments & accessories.
Big Thanks ❤️❤️❤️ to the Australian Government and those people working in the Australian High Commission office in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

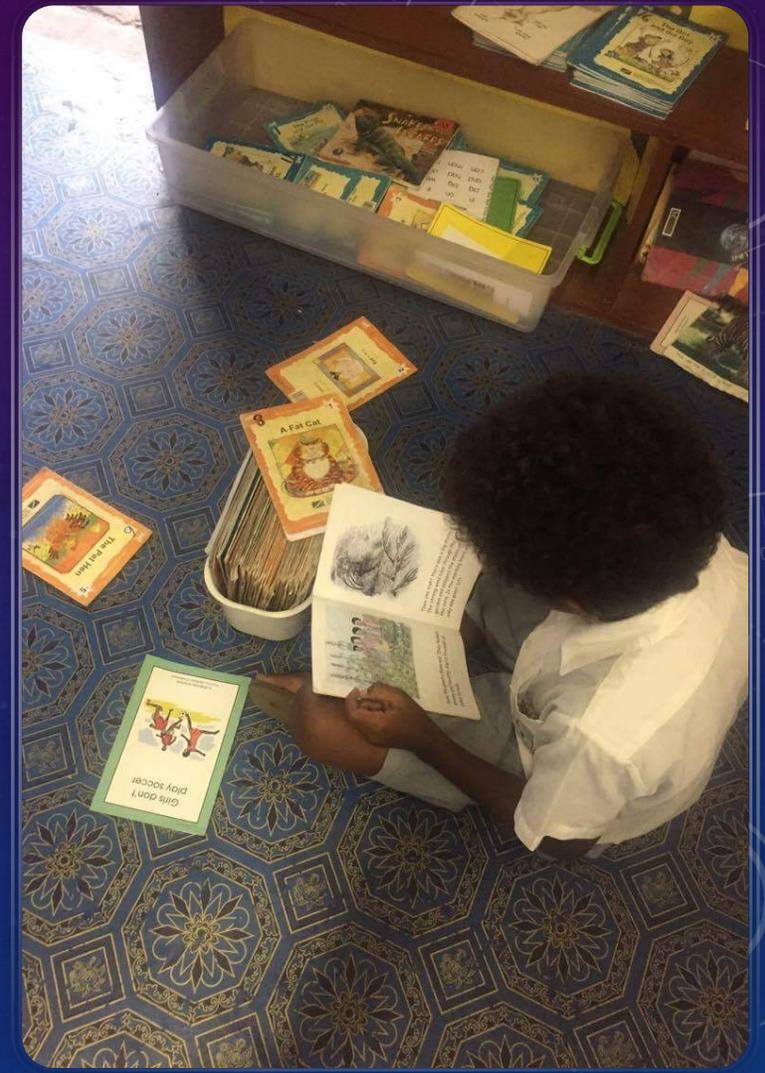


CHILDREN'S STORY BOOK FOCUS

- Work with Grade 6 students
- Design your own or adapt an existing story to
 - retell it in both English and Pijin, and
 - give the story a Solomon Islands slant by including Solomon Islands cultural elements.
- Assist the Solomon Islander children with English reading, writing and speaking and ICT skills to type the story
- Encourage SI children to develop illustrations for the story
- Design the pages, layout and nature of the story
- There will be an online exhibition at the end of semester, where you will showcase your story.

TEACHERS' LITERACY PLANNING FOCUS

- Work with grade level teams of Solomon Island teachers to plan a literacy-focused learning sequence
- The plan aims to enhance English teaching skills and subsequent English outcomes for Solomon Islander children.
- SI teachers should select the literacy focus (can be more than one) – e.g., vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, creative writing, etc.
- Each team will have a budget from which they can draw on to purchase and/or print relevant resources to develop the pack for use in classrooms.
- There will be an online exhibition towards the end of semester, where you will showcase your story to a wider audience.



OVERARCHING PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- There are learning outcomes for both Australian PSTs and Solomon Islanders involved in the virtual experience. These outcomes include:
 1. Conversational English and Pijin speaking through the planning time
 2. English language teaching resources and skills for SI teachers and for Australian PSTs
 3. Inter-cultural understanding development through sharing cultural contexts and learning resources
 4. Enhanced ICT skills and confidence

CHALLENGES



- COVID-19 related delays and changes in each state
 - (Mis) Communication
 - Correspondence and changes
 - Admin and logistical processes
 - Getting (wrong) equipment / transit
 - Lists and coordination
 - Internet connectivity
 - Computer literacy skills
 - Staffing
-
- It has NOT been easy!!



EXPERIENCES



“Well, that was a shambles, but wasn’t there so much joy in the room!” (Mary Gallagher)

- “...has been an incredibly fulfilling, exciting, inter-cultural learning experience for me as a first-year ACU pre-service teacher. The fast-paced, ever-changing, unexpected environment, is the perfect hub for growth, resilience, the ability to adapt quickly and effectively while maintaining a fun, enriching encounter with the kids. The exposure to this program will support shape my teaching career into an open-minded, culturally versed, and adaptive future teacher.” (ACU PST)*
- “Humour: Can be such a great way to help with nerves, so I made a few funny faces with J who was very shy, he responded by laughing and making silly faces back. I guess I just wanted to humanise myself and make him feel comfortable. This is all very new to him and friends.” (ACU PST)*
- “The program has been an exciting, hands-on, practical, snap shot of cross cultural education. The program and the children are teaching me to appreciate and embrace the unexpected.” (ACU PST)*



WINS



“We’re so blessed that our school is the first to roll out such virtual learning programs for students and teachers in Primary schools especially in BECS and probably throughout the Solomon Islands...

As Solomon Islanders, English might be the 3rd, 4th even the 5th language we spoke. By rolling on this virtual interactive sessions, it will really help enhance our students and teachers in terms of confidence in writing skills, speaking and the interaction with first English speakers...

Our Primary school in now setting a bench mark as compared to other schools throughout the Solomon Islands ...

As well as our teachers will have access to the most needed learning resources and information’s from the internet...” (Charlwis Raphael)



Charlwis Raphael is with Bernadette Suiqa.

September 10 at 2:36 PM · 🌐

It's really been a success and the happiest moments ever for our year 6 students for the first time to actually involved in such a virtual learning program(classes) to actually interact with our friends and partners in learning(ACU-BECS) from Australia during the time of Covid.



FUTURE...

- Finish the current program
- Evaluate this experience
- Moving forward:
 - Possibility of expanding the 'usual' program- being able to develop relationships and start cultural training by interacting with BECS students prior to in-country experience.
 - Hope for the continuation of a meaningful and rich partnership, not as an online alternative, but rather an *as well as...*

Thank you for listening. Any questions?

