

Bringing the world to the classroom – towards ‘virtual reality’ pedagogies for international education

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Abstract

The ‘field’ is an integral part of international education at the tertiary level. Students are taken to the field in order to experience, first hand, the themes, processes and people that they learn about in the classroom. Despite the critical importance of the fieldtrip mode of teaching and the positive impact it has on learning, budget constraints mean that fieldtrips are becoming less common in tertiary curricula, especially when they involve learning about international topics. One potential way to counteract this is to identify how we might construct a ‘virtual’ field. This article reflects on this process in general and presents two case studies that attempt to bring the field to the classroom.

Keywords: international education, development studies, geography, tourism, virtual reality, simulation games, virtual fieldwork

Introduction

International education involves not only students travelling internationally to study in institutions away from their home but also students at home learning about topics, places and people overseas. This international dimension to learning is a key element to nearly all tertiary level subjects, where international experience and ideas are drawn upon to exemplify ‘global’ concepts and comparisons. In subjects such as Human Geography, Tourism Studies, Anthropology and Development Studies, however, it is particularly important given that the subjects of study are often located on other shores. Furthermore, understandings of the subjects concerned require deep understanding of the different places, cultures, environments, experiences and values that shape the everyday lives of people in other parts of the world.

Learning in such situations presents particular challenges. Commonly practiced pedagogies are based on diffusion of information about such places from a teacher to students through lectures, texts and practical exercises. Such texts and lectures are effective, arguably, for conveying information and data about such places but they are not effective at allowing students to experience in some way the realities of life in unfamiliar places. Words and images may stimulate imaginations and encourage students to think about distant places but they do not contain critical visceral and experiential elements of learning: the ability to taste, hear, smell and feel what it is like to live somewhere else. Nor is it easy to provoke emotional reactions and attachments to the subjects of study for students find it hard to ‘live in the skin’ or ‘walk in the shoes’ of others.

Whilst it is often impossible to enable students to have such first-hand experiences and feelings – without very costly and lengthy visits to the places concerned – some alternative pedagogies may provide the means where these learning objectives can be met at least in part. In these, we draw inspiration from teaching and learning approaches that emphasise

the value of learning by 'doing' and 'playing' (Ruben, 1999). When students gain some sort of emotional reaction from engaging with their subject material – whether that be a sense of fun in a game, a feeling of outrage at being confronted with injustice or deprivation, or feeling of wonderment at hearing or seeing something new – then they learn well. Such ideas stem from pioneer educationalists Piaget (1932) and Huizinga (1949) in particular. Furthermore, again from these sources, we know that students learn better from their peers and when there is a sense of co-learning – as opposed to a hierarchical top-down transfer of knowledge from a supposedly all-knowing teacher to passive students.

This paper explores the way new approaches to teaching and learning might be employed to provide a richer and more realistic experience for students seeking understanding of field sites overseas. It begins with a general discussion of the value of field work and field trips in the social sciences, then draws on two initiatives that the authors have developed: a virtual field trip and a simulation game. Though not unique, these initiatives are novel in their scope and design and it possible to draw some preliminary findings and observations on their success. The paper concludes by calling for greater use of such alternative pedagogies in international education.

The Value of the Field in Social Sciences

Fieldtrips are an important pedagogic tool for a range of disciplines. Indeed the pedagogic value of experiential and situated learning was promoted as early as the 1940s by the educational philosopher John Dewey (1963). It is widely recognised that such field trips allow students to benefit from the rich experiential learning such endeavours entail and that such situated learning environments assist in crystallising learning outcomes (Jakubowski, 2003; Scarce, 1997). Fieldwork is integral to geographical studies at the tertiary level (Nairn, Higgitt & Vanneste, 2000). It is also useful in Development Studies and Tourism Studies as well as physical science subjects such as Geology and Biology. In such subjects fieldwork allows the student to taste, feel and hear the subject matter in ways that cannot be captured through traditional study techniques. Often students report that the fieldtrip component of their education has been the highlight and the point at which many of the concepts and processes taught in the lecture room become understandable and tangible. Traditionally fieldtrips involve transporting students to places where they will reside for 5-10 days where they carry out research, observation and other exercises intended to illuminate geographical and other concepts. The need for fieldtrips in Development Studies is particularly salient given that the culture and places that are being taught about are often foreign to the students. It is important that they are able to experience such places first hand. However, financial constraints on both institutions and students mean that there is pressure on using the fieldtrip as a means of instruction. Foreign fieldtrips are the hardest to organise and execute and thus the pressure is highest on this valuable mode of teaching.

How might the pressure described above be alleviated? One way is to develop the concept of 'virtual fieldwork' (Hirsch & Lloyd, 2005; Stainfield et al, 2000) - methods that bring the field to the classroom (or to the studies of the student) and that allow them to role play situations where geographical understandings can be developed. The authors of this paper use what could be collectively termed virtual field techniques frequently. Some courses at Victoria University of Wellington in the Geography and Tourism programmes¹ begin with the use of music which ties into the places being studied and allows the introduction of themes that are relevant. This has a number of purposes. Firstly, it sets a comfortable atmosphere for class and helps students distance themselves from previous activities. Secondly, the

¹ Specifically courses taught by Murray and Schott respectively.

music is a stimulant to discussion before class begins and acts to humanise places. It allows the lecturers involved to teach the basic geography of places – their location and a little bit about the culture. In other classes, music is written and performed in order to highlight relevant issues in a way that encourages students to feel passionate about the subject. Elsewhere in classes on the impacts of globalization on peasant farmers who have been pushed out by large scale grape exporting companies, the export grapes that are produced are offered to the class and students are thus invited to ‘taste globalization’- a technique that might be termed ‘performing’ development. In both Geography and Tourism role play techniques are used extensively and through assignments. For example in a second year development course students are assigned the task of applying for the Directorship of New Zealand’s aid programme (see Box 1). All of these things are intended to bring the field to the classroom and as teaching devices help mark classes and improve retention and attendance.

Box 1 – An example of virtual reality assignment

Applications are invited for the position of

Director of the Department of New Zealand Agency for International Development²

To apply you must complete the tasks listed below. Letters of application to be addressed to the Minister of Assessment, Institute of Geography

Task – Write a 1,500 word letter applying for the above position.

Layout and content - Set out the letter as you would a real application letter with an introductory paragraph and final formalities. In the main body of the letter you should cover the themes and/or questions listed below. Do not answer them under sub-headings – you should weave them into your application.

- a) What is NZAID?
- b) What is the purpose of NZAID?
- c) How has its focus (geographically and thematically) varied over time?
- d) What are the major recommendations of the review of 2001?
- e) How can you defend these recommendations?
- f) How do these recommendations relate to shifts in aid provision in the world as a whole?
- g) In your opinion which 10 Pacific Island countries should be given priority for aid delivery?
- h) Given a budget of \$300 million how would you share it out between the island nation-states that you have selected? On what basis do you make that decision?
- i) Map your response to the above showing clearly the amounts to be spent in each case. You will have to identify and generate (perhaps draw) your own base maps
- j) What is your personal vision for the role of NZAID over the next 10 years?

There is great potential to take this approach further and develop models of virtual fieldwork that will be applicable across the social sciences in New Zealand and beyond. This paper presents experiences from two examples of alternative pedagogies employed at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand in the Development Studies/Geography and Tourism Studies programmes. These programmes – in these two examples - involve topics in geographies of globalisation and tourism and in development policy where the site of instruction (Wellington) is far removed from the subject material (variously developing country case studies in the Pacific Islands, Asia, Latin America and Africa). Very few of the students have direct and extensive experience of these places – some have never travelled outside of New Zealand and their prior knowledge has been conditioned by (frequently

² This task was designed when NZAID was in existence. In 2009 NZAID was, in effect, disestablished, being reintegrated to the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Director’s position was also redefined at the time.

distorted and selective) material in the news media, popular entertainment or high school textbooks. Actual field trips to sites in, say, the Pacific Islands, would be highly desirable but not practical given time and financial constraints. Therefore, more innovative teaching and learning strategies have been developed. Below we outline two of these at different stages in their application: virtual fieldtrips and simulation games that have involved the authors in the design and delivery of relevant courses.³

Towards Virtual Fieldwork: A 'Fieldtrip' to Fiji

Today's university environments are resource constrained and traditional residential fieldtrips have become less common. We lament this and propose that the concept of 'virtual' fieldtrips presents a potentially powerful tool, which if designed and applied appropriately, might replicate some aspects of the real fieldtrip experience. A virtual fieldtrip would attempt to recreate aspects of the real world in digital format where assignments and tasks equivalent to those set in the residential fieldtrip environment would be applied. Essentially, this would involve computer-based learning where spatial location and place-based data could be provided a set-up for analysis by students. This goes further than just using the internet to research places – as is often done. Through the virtual fieldtrip the student would be immersed into the visual and sonic landscapes that 'make' places and thus the interpretation of data would recognise this context – something which is only possible at present through residential fieldtrip activity. The concept of the virtual fieldtrip is something which is cutting edge and is yet to feature in the international literature.

It is towards this end that a project is currently underway at Victoria University of Wellington to build a virtual fieldtrip to the Yasawa Islands in Fiji. The project is broadly guided by the pedagogy of authentic learning (Lombardi, 2007). Through virtual fieldwork students could be exposed to at least some of the nuances of real fieldwork helping to bring material covered in the classroom alive. More specifically, the following three learner-centred aims motivate the project:

- To enhance authenticity of the learning context and illustrate complexities and dilemmas facing communities in developing countries by examining a multi-dimensional, multi-stakeholder digital case-study informed by a community in the Yasawa Islands (Fiji)
- Foster an acute sense of the interconnectedness of different stakeholders, social, cultural, environmental and economic factors by using a variety of media that can be integrated to create (digital) immersion in the community and its complex environmental and economic space
- Lower the learning access barriers for a wide range of learning styles using types of technology that are increasingly part of popular youth culture as well as a range of learning media (audio, video, photographic, text, interactive, etc)

The virtual fieldtrip created during this pilot phase will be a valuable problem-based learning tool for students. As well as this the pathway and technical knowledge required to develop the virtual fieldtrip will have great value to other disciplines that seek to increase the level of

³ There are other approaches that are used in the institution and elsewhere – such as the use of video material, internet conferences and limited role playing – but we believe that these two examples present significant opportunities to implement new ways of teaching and learning in international education at the tertiary level.

relevance and complexity of material used through virtual pedagogic means. Feedback from colleagues in other schools and departments indicates keen interest in such a learning tool. In addition to the horizontal expandability of the project, it can also be updated by amending and refreshing certain components of the case study to retain its relevance in years to come. The project has been implemented in three stages and these are described below.

Stage 1 Software identification

An examination of existent software packages was conducted to identify the most appropriate (user-friendly, versatile, adaptable, cost and time effective) software to design a virtual fieldtrip environment (during pilot stage with learning focus for Tourism Management and Development Studies students). A brief scoping study identified the list of software that will need to be assessed in this context to include: Active Worlds, C3, Digital Space Traveler, Google Earth, NASA World Wind, Second Life, Spherical Panorama Virtual Tour Builder 4.15. Of these a version of Second Life was chosen.

Stage 2 Construction of Virtual Environment

Fieldwork was conducted for two weeks in 2011 by the project leader (Schott) and an assistant with an intimate knowledge of the locality in Yasawa Island (Fiji) to develop a case study that is up-to-date and authentic in its representation of the community and the complexities communities in developing countries are facing in the 21st century. To generate the case material in formats suitable for the virtual fieldtrip, information was collected in video format, audio clips, photographs, geographical satellite images, statistical databases, reports, diagrams, etc. The different media are currently being built into the software to recreate as many of the community's characteristics, area's features, and external factors as possible. Once completed, students on the fieldtrip will be able to manoeuvre around the virtual island of Yasawa and learn about the community's characteristics, area's features, and external factors by visiting different areas and accessing different media that together help build a comprehensive problem-based case study on which a variety of learning objectives can be implemented. The local community was greatly supportive of the project as a means of educating others about the challenges faced by Pacific Island communities.

Stage 3 Construction of assessment and pilot application

Students in the Tourism Management course TOUR250 'Managing Visitor Impacts' will be asked to go on the virtual fieldtrip in September 2011 (Development Studies students at a later stage). In order to link this visit to course learning outcomes, groups of four students will be asked to collaborate on a project which requires them to develop a basic tourism development strategy with poverty alleviation as a primary focus. An additional requirement will be for their proposal to embody the interwoven concepts of cultural, economical, environmental, and social sustainability. At the conclusion of the student project formal research in the form of an anonymous questionnaire will be conducted, which will be complemented by focus group research in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of both the concept of virtual fieldtrips and the specific tool used for this purpose.

At the time of writing the project had reached stage three and was being developed for application in the classroom and as such it is not possible to offer detailed analysis of the outcomes, achievements or pitfalls. We can at least reflect on what we expect to be the outcome. Virtual fieldwork offers enhanced relevance/proximity to reality of the case presented. This is expected to lead to greater learner engagement with the material – something which at present is only available through residential fieldwork. The expectation

is that the site /community will be presented in a more comprehensive manner than would be the case in more conventional text-based problem solving case study. This aspect will be fostered by the use of diverse media (audio, video, interactive tools) and should ultimately assist in bringing the site/case 'alive'. The variety of media used coupled with the interactive nature of the technology will also be more closely aligned with learners' everyday life than is the case with case-studies in text books. The overall format and media used to create the fieldtrip experience is also expected to lower learning access barriers for a wider range of learning styles than conventional text based case-studies would. In some of the potentially suitable software packages students can communicate with each other in real time while on the virtual fieldtrip – this enhances learning outcomes by fostering collaboration between students. As a result, the virtual fieldtrip environment can also be used as a virtual meeting room which allows for greater geographical flexibility for group work tasks. Virtual fieldwork could also be a very useful tool in distance learning based environments.

We are also aware of what the virtual fieldtrip cannot achieve. It will not give a sense of the culture of the place under study and in this sense there is no substitute for spending time immersed in the locality as in conventional fieldwork, especially that which is longer term. Students will not be able to experience the importance of attempting to understand and adapt to local practice in order to achieve a respectful and ethical relationship with those that one is working with. Participants will not experience the sheer joy of new relationships with individuals that reveal things that could never be outlined through this medium. Furthermore, fieldwork is often as much about presenting one's only reality to those in the field as the other way around – the virtual mode is a one-way model. Although there might be some technical way around these challenges, ambitions for this mode of teaching need to be realistic. At best it will provide a taste of field for student in a novel way that complements and diversifies assessment in a manner which help stimulate and inspire students to do further more intensive and immersive work in the future. The ultimate aim then is to inspire students to go onto postgraduate study in tourism, development of geographical studies where they are more likely to be able to experience the unique and irreplaceable emotional and educational experience of being immersed in foreign fieldwork.

Simulation Games: The Tiers Monde 'Game'

Much educational theory has highlighted the value of play in effective learning (Huizinga, 1948; Asal, 2005; Lean et al, 2006) yet this pedagogical approach is often shunned in tertiary education settings where there is emphasis on higher level concepts and content and where 'play' can be regarded as 'not serious' and more the preserve of primary education. One way in which play is utilised though is through the use of simulations. This is a well-established approach to teaching and learning in fields as diverse as military studies, business and management (for examples see Ambrosio, 2009; Faria, Hutchinson & Wellington, 2009; Fletcher, 2001; Kanner, 2007; Livingstone, 1999; Wheeler, 2006). Simulations allow students and their teachers to test scenarios and, through role playing, put themselves in the position of decision makers where their choices can be contextualised and tested, then analysed critically through debriefing (Steinwachs, 1992; Petranek, Corey & Black, 1992).

Whilst the value of simulation exercises are recognised in several studies (Cherryholmes, 1966; Chin, Dukes & Gamson, 2009), it is noted that they are not as widely used as may be expected. The reasons for this low rate of adoption seemingly include high workload for teachers (in preparation, monitoring and assessment), potential risks for managing personal involvement and relationships in a game, and a continued perception that 'games' and 'play'

are ineffective as learning devices. In addition, where simulations are used, they are often only employed for a single class or practical exercise where they can be managed more closely and where the consequences for failure can be minimised and contained. With such limited adoption, the potential for longer term and deeper learning experiences is diminished.

In 2008, a new postgraduate course in development policy was introduced at Victoria University of Wellington. The teaching of development policy presents particular challenges in a situation (such as this in New Zealand) where students often have first hand experience of neither policy formulation nor developing world contexts where development aid policy is formulated, implemented and evaluated. A conventional approach to teaching this subject would involve examination of texts regarding 'ideal' policy frameworks, policy approaches and policy actors. It would cover typical or desired policy processes and outcomes and the role of individual agency, interpersonal relationships and geographical context might receive some mention but would be very much of secondary importance. However, with this course, the instructors⁴ decided to take a different approach. They were convinced that a textbook approach to development policy was inadequate and that it did little to prepare students for the reality of understanding, and working within, policy-making environments where factors such as personal relationships, networks, the exercise of power, negotiations, and compromise were everyday critical elements in the way policy was formulated and implemented. In addition it was felt that students needed to gain a deep understanding of the different institutions and actors in development policy: from high level diplomatic missions to village-level meetings. It was felt that they should begin to understand how power is exercised – often in subtle and discursive ways – and how it can be variously manipulated, avoided, resisted or captured. Critical here was the need for students to gain an emotional as well as intellectual understanding of power – to feel frustration, annoyance, powerlessness or, on the other hand, the sometimes seductive allure of having power. Only with these understandings, it was believed, could students gain a reasonable insight into the realities of development policy – and therefore become in time more effective development practitioners.

As a result of these general philosophies and objectives of the course, it was decided to adopt a radical approach: to run virtually the whole course as a simulation exercise, albeit one with preparatory material, a tight structure and space for review and analysis throughout. This became the 'Tiers Monde' exercise which has now run for four years with different cohorts of students and a range of learning experiences that now permit reflection. The details of the game and its insight into three critical issues in simulation games (the level of realism, the role of the instructors, and assessment) has been addressed elsewhere (Prinsen & Overton, 2011) but here we can highlight some additional issues of simulations as they relate to lessons for international education. These involve role playing, negotiations and the centrality of interpersonal skills and networks.

The course ran over a twelve week semester. The first three weeks were devoted to background classes on the policy environment that provided students on foundational material on international approaches to development policy including major trends in policy, agreements such as the 2005 Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness, and alternative aid modalities such as projects, sector wide approaches (SWAps) and general budget support (GBS) (Koeberle & Stavreski, 2006; de Haan, 2009). During this time the students (usually some 25-30 in each cohort) were assigned to teams and decided on their individual roles. Background materials were also provided on the fictional setting for the simulation – a

⁴ This course is taught by Prinsen and Overton.

country called the Peoples Democratic Republic of Tiers Monde, loosely modelled on a pastiche Francophone West African country. In addition the scope of the simulation was prescribed as concerning the formulation, implementation and evaluation of a SWAp in the education sector that was to be financed in part by international aid donors. The six teams involved spanned different development actors from aid donors, (recipient) finance and education ministries, a district department of education and civil society in the form of a national research and advocacy organisation and a local NGO. Within these teams were between four and six roles with characters that covered a full range from a European Ambassador and the local Minister of Finance to the secretary of the local NGO and a teachers' representative at the district department. Before the simulation began in earnest, students had to try and 'get into the skin' of their characters by conducting research on the likely profile of their character and submit for assessment a fictional curriculum vitae of their character. This exercise asked them not only to produce a written document but also to invent a back story for their character, to invent in their mind a person that had a history, a family and an education, and had aspirations, experiences and emotions.

Following the first three weeks of background, the simulation began and was structured around three phases: policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. In each phase, teams met first by themselves to discuss their objectives and tactics; then they met with other teams as appropriate to negotiate and come to decisions about the SWAp; then there was a final session where the groups (now out of character) presented a critical reflection and analysis of what had happened in the simulation. Then they stepped back into character and began the next phase. This structure involved the simulation restarting at a new point so that decisions (and possible mistakes or blind alleys) were not carried forward and 'cumulative error' was avoided.

Role playing emerged as a particular issue that warrants examination. Although there was some variation over the four years that the game has run, the instructors were surprised and delighted by the extent to which many students 'played' their roles. The CV exercise has proved very successful with a remarkable degree of both research (finding examples on the internet of how a real life person with a similar role presents themselves) and creativity (with humour and imagination used to invent names, work histories and education records). In some cases they lived their roles outside the confines of the classroom, for example inventing email addresses for their characters so that others could communicate with them in character or calling each other by their role names in social settings outside the university. In these circumstances, the structured breaks in the game became critical to provide some relief and allow students to recover and not allow game situations and relationships to take over their real lives. Throughout, it appeared to be a challenge – but a rewarding one – for students to continually ask themselves to think and act like their assumed characters rather than, as often, a student from a middle class New Zealand background.

The second issue observed was the importance of negotiation (and the exercise of power) in development policy. This has proved to one of the most enlightening aspects of the simulation exercise and potentially it is of great value as a learning experience. Negotiations and negotiation skills are a critical element of development practice – as they are in other policy spheres – yet they are very hard to teach in conventional text-based approaches. By asking students in the Tiers Monde simulation to organise meetings, chair them and participate in them in character, a number of lessons seem to have been learned. One of these is the importance of meeting procedure (the setting of agendas, the role of the chair and the need to ensure participation of the various parties) and gaining practice in doing these things. Yet of greater interest is the way the more subtle elements of meetings and

negotiations emerged. Some students learned how agenda setting was critical – how this could be constructed in clever ways to help achieve certain outcomes or steer discussion in particular ways. Other students saw how an effective chair could also use their power in that position to steer the course of a meeting and sometimes sideline or silence unwanted voices or dissent. Others felt the power of an invitation and how being excluded from a certain meeting (when they might have hoped to have been invited – or even informed that a meeting was taking place) could lead to profound feelings of frustration and disempowerment. In a wider sense, the negotiations that took place in the simulation often matched the complexities of real life. Decisions were sometimes made behind closed doors prior to an official meeting, interpersonal networks were used to manipulate a decision, and compromises were reached when it was realised by some players that reaching for them a less than optimal decision was preferable to not reaching a decision at all.

A third issue was the vital importance of interpersonal skills and networks. In the simulation and the development of their roles, students were given a short character brief on which to base their game characters. These indicated some linkages with other characters that they had (for example characters with a pre-existing personal connection but in different teams) and there was some guidance as to what relationships might or might not develop (unlikely that a foreign ambassador would know or talk deeply to a district education officer!). Yet within these parameters players were left to develop relationships – sometimes these were guided by real life friendships that carried over into the game (but only if they could reasonably be expected to occur). Such relationships became critical in the simulation. Situations often arose when a quick decision or compromise was needed and students learned that a quiet word with another character could expedite matters much more effectively than a formal meeting. Ideally – though unlikely within the narrow confines of the simulation – students would develop skills that allowed them to develop and use such personal networks. Yet even if these could not be practiced much in the exercise, at least skills in interpersonal communication, such as use of politeness, respect and humour, could be seen by participants to be so important in the way policy was developed and put into practice.

The Tiers Monde simulation, then, has been successful in many aspects of the learning process, at least as revealed in student feedback and evaluations. However, it has not always worked perfectly as planned. Student feedback has occasionally spoken of heavy workloads for them as they have put a great deal of effort – both physical and emotional – into the exercise, more than they do in conventional classes. In addition, the heavy emphasis on group work has led to the expected issues of some freeloading whilst others shoulder more than their share (though perhaps this is also a useful lesson about real life work and the need to manage these situations). One danger that was foreseen by the instructors was the possible issue of the course not being taken seriously because it involved ‘play’ and a ‘game’ (often with a good deal of fun and humour involved). Yet, this proved to be little in evidence. There were times where performance (as in group critical reflection presentations) took precedence over analytical substance but usually the degree of serious engagement and analysis exceeded expectations. Finally it should be noted that this learning experience through simulations must have a heavy dose of reflection and analysis where students step back out of character and examine what has happened in the simulation in terms of what might be expected as suggested by the literature. For the most part this element is left to a major individual assignment at the conclusion of the course. The teachers, following some student feedback, however feel that this should not have had the emphasis it did and that more communal class time should have been allocated to debriefing, discussion and overall analysis. Often in a simulation exercise, many small (but

important) interactions and conversations take place that are not observed by all participants and it is necessary to use a class discussion as a forum to have observations of these brought out so that others can hear about them and explore their significance.

Thus the Tiers Monde simulation exercise has proved to be an interesting and valuable way for students to learn about, in this case, development policy in an international setting whilst confined to a classroom in New Zealand. The simulation game with its structured requirements and interactions has exposed students to many real world situations, such as dealing with uncertainty, pressure, frustrations and pleasures. For example, they are deliberately presented with a very large quantity of reading and resource material, knowing that they cannot possibly all cover every aspect of this material. So they learn to skim, to select and to use 'evidence' in ways that support their position. It may be a far cry from the academic skills of neutral, detached and informed analysis but it is probably a closer insight into the realities of development work. Learning comes through experiencing and feeling the pressures and uncertainties of actual interpersonal and inter- (and intra-) institutional relationships. Development policy is revealed not as a formulaic process but one characterised by political processes, the complex exercise of power in many forms, and the possibility of very diverse negotiated outcomes. Overall the approach helps students, through their imaginations and creativity, to take a virtual trip away from the lecture room and into the boardrooms, government offices and village meetings that characterise the reality of development practice.

Conclusion: Pedagogies for International Education

International education, when involving students in one part of the world learning about places elsewhere, presents particular challenges for teachers and lecturers but, we argue, also considerable opportunities for effective learning. Indeed, learning about the world must be a cornerstone of tertiary education in nearly any subject. Yet our conventional teaching tools, relying on the textbook, the lecture room and the white board, do not serve us well in this regard. Students can be confronted with a wealth of colourless, unfamiliar and uninteresting material that does not often connect to or stimulate their emotions and desire to learn more. However, educational theory from Piaget to Huizinga and Freire (1972) has provided us with inspiration to shape new pedagogies that may be constrained by the physical reality of the classroom and site of learning but which can open up new imaginations and even experiences of a world far beyond.

The two examples presented here – of virtual fieldtrips and simulation games – show some ways in which students can learn differently. By listening to the music of Mexico or eating grapes from Chile, they gain a sensory connection with the places they read about in books. Others, through researching and developing a curriculum vitae of a person in West Africa, begin to shape understandings of people that see a whole life of family histories, a childhood, an education, a work history, a name and an imagined personality – rather than just a faceless description of 'an African civil servant' or an 'aid official'. These exercises lead to emotional connections and responses. Although the courses described can only be but tiny insights into life elsewhere – and they can be distorted by the biases of the teachers, the lack of information and unpredictable trajectory of imaginations set free – we are strongly of the view that these emotional connections and responses are critical to more effective learning in international education. It can come in many ways: the way a peasant resistance song can illuminate the deep feeling of injustice; the joy felt at the (virtual) exploration of an island in Fiji; the frustration experienced by a role-playing local NGO member when excluded from a government meeting; and the realisation that a strategic social relationship can be

more important than a policy document in formulating a primary education SWAp. Learning that builds experiences and touches human feelings is learning that promotes both personal awareness and international understanding.

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