Tree of Opportunity: 
Re-thinking Pacific Education

Selected papers from the 2001 Re-thinking Pacific Education Colloquium

Edited by
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# Contents

Acknowledgements............................................ i  
Dedication.......................................................... i  
Introduction....................................................... iii  
Preface.............................................................. viii  
Our Contributors.............................................. ix  

**CHAPTER 1 – Taufeʻulungaki**  
Pacific Education: Are There Alternatives?....................... 1  

**CHAPTER 2 – Thaman**  
Towards Cultural Democracy in Pacific Education:  
An Imperative for the 21st Century.............................. 27  

**CHAPTER 3 – Fasi**  
Issues and Challenges: A Personal Statement............... 41  

**CHAPTER 4 – Nabobo**  
Computer Tigers and Coconut Trees.......................... 48  

**CHAPTER 5 - Roughan**  
The Economy Dictates the School Curriculum................. 66  

**CHAPTER 6 – Sanga**  
Beyond Access and Participation:  
Challenges Facing Pacific Education............................ 71  

**CHAPTER 7 – Singh**  
Addressing Issues and Challenges Facing  
Pacific Education................................................ 82  

**CHAPTER 8 – Puamau**  
Rethinking Education in Fiji: Issues and Solutions  
in the 21st Century.................................................. 86
CHAPTER 9 – Teaero
Old Challenges, ‘New’ Responses to Educational Issues in Kiribati

CHAPTER 10 – Heine
A Marshall Islands Perspective

CHAPTER 11 – Mel
Noman/Mbu Noman/Nuim: The Need for Wisdom in Our Culture

CHAPTER 12 – Afamasaga
Personal Reflections on Education in Samoa

CHAPTER 13 – Maneipuri
Solomon Islands Education: Issues and Challenges

CHAPTER 14 – Kalolo
A Tokelau Perspective

CHAPTER 15 – Niroa
Reflections on Vanuatu’s Education System

CHAPTER 16 – Pasikale
Pacific Education in New Zealand

CHAPTER 17 – Penetito
Personal Reflections on Developments in Māori Education: 1970-2001

CHAPTER 18 – Tuioti
Pacific Education in Aotearoa

Recommendations

Index
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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Gurmit Singh, whose untimely death in May 2001 was a great loss for all who worked with him in his many enterprises. His work in the field of education, spanning several decades, has been of enormous benefit to many. He is one of whom it is truly said: He made a difference.
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Dedication

This e-book version is dedicated to the late Teweariki (Tevi) Teaero, one of the founding members of the RPEIPP. Tevi, as he was known to his friends and colleagues, passed away in his homeland of Kiribati just a few months prior to the launching of this e-book. The late Mr. Teaero was a respected leader, intellectual, educator and artist. His noteworthy contributions to Kiribati and Pacific education and art spanned years of credible and competent service within institutions including The University of the South Pacific. The Vaka Pasifiki Education Family, of which Tevi was a respected member, remembers him with fondness as a gentleman and a Pacific regional educator deserving of esteem.
Introduction

In April 25-27, 2001, a Colloquium on Re-thinking Pacific Education, funded by New Zealand, through NZODA, and hosted by the Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific, became the first joint activity undertaken under the umbrella of the MOU signed between the University and The Victoria University of Wellington. It provided the opportunity for a select group of Pacific educators, 18 in all, who have already begun the process of interrogating development, to share, debate, and reflect on what they believe to be the main issues and challenges in Pacific education today and to begin exploring new directions and alternatives in education and development, which might prove more meaningful to Pacific people.

The Colloquium began with the assumption that the 30 years or so of extensive reforms in Pacific education and significant investments by national governments and donor agencies have largely failed to provide the quality human resources needed to achieve developmental goals. However, it also noted that, while educational priority focuses on improving the overall quality of education, access to schooling, and equity of outcomes, the over-riding issues of what education is, what its purposes are, and what the Pacific visions are for Pacific received little or no attention. Educational reforms have remained largely fixated on improving various aspects of the quantification of education, but there has been little questioning of the values and assumptions underpinning formal education or development.

Research in other parts of the world indicates that to achieve quality education it is not enough to improve leadership, train teachers, revise and renew the curricula, provide adequate support resources, upgrade facilities, widen access, lower costs, mobilise community support, and change the structures of schools and systems, unless the cultures of schools and systems – that is, the values and belief systems that underpin the behaviours and actions of individuals and institutions, and the structures and processes they create – undergo fundamental changes. Some Pacific educators have similarly come to attribute the failure to achieve such quality education to the incongruence between
the values promoted by formal Western schooling, the modern media, economic systems, and globalisation on the one hand and those held by Pacific communities on the other.

**Issues in Pacific Education**

The Colloquium identified the basic issues that contributed to such failure. Not surprisingly, the same issues that have challenged the region for the last thirty years surfaced again: quality, access, equity, relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. These were related to other issues, such as effective leadership and management; political commitment; adequacy of human and material resources; planning capacity; adequacy of data, information, and research; quality of teachers; relevant and appropriate curriculum; and appropriate language policies. The Colloquium noted, however, that these variables were insufficient in themselves to account for the continuing high pushout/failure rate of Pacific students in formal schooling at all levels, not only in the region, but also in metropolitan countries, where the quality of the inputs is much higher.

From its insider perspective, representing as it were the collective experience of Pacific educators who were also successful students of the formal education sector, the Colloquium targeted issues that are most likely to ensure success in formal education, not just for the privileged few but for all Pacific peoples. Two key issues were identified which subsume a number of related issues.

The first is the lack of ownership by Pacific peoples of the formal education process. It was noted that, while the churches have succeeded in becoming fully integrated with the Pacific way of life, education remains an alien process and is viewed by Pacific peoples as something that is imposed from outside: an instrument designed to fail, exclude, and marginalise the majority and therefore irrelevant and meaningless to their way of life.

The second follows on from the first, and that is the lack of a clearly articulated vision for Pacific people, which could inform both development and education, assuming, of course, that education is accepted as the key instrument in achieving national visions and
developmental goals. Because they do not own the process, educational visions and goals tended to be defined by external sources, as is the case today and has been since the introduction of formal education. The questions that the Colloquium raised relate to these two fundamental issues: What does education mean in the context of the Pacific and what are its purposes within the formal school system? How do we deal with the alien/foreign nature of schools generally, the curriculum and assessment, the methodology, school structure, culture, and management? How do we prepare all students to be successful members of their societies? What are changes that are needed in education to bring this about? Are we (wrongly) perpetuating
Western models of education? We are educating for failure – how can we ensure that more/most/all succeed? Children are learning in an alien language. How can we ensure that the advantages to the learning process of their mother tongues are maintained and enhanced and used as the foundation for teaching and learning in English or another language? Education is an expensive process, so how can we ensure that education is affordable by all without relying forever on external assistance? How can education take more account of parents’ and communities’ aspirations? How do we ensure that the village economy is sustained and harmony established with the increasing numbers of pushouts, dropouts, and repeaters? The numbers of school leavers are increasing but job-creation and opportunities are diminishing. How do we address this? How do we build on the achievements already made? What kinds of research and data do we need to assist us in finding answers and solutions to these questions?

**The Challenge**

The main challenge, then, is to reconceptualise education in a way that will allow Pacific people to reclaim the education process, which will, at the same time, allow for the articulation of a Pacific vision for education. The Colloquium agreed on “The Tree of Opportunity” as the most appropriate metaphor for Re-thinking Pacific Education, as depicted on the next page.

The Tree of Opportunity encapsulates the new vision for Pacific education based on the assumption that the main purpose of education in the Pacific is the survival, transformation, and sustainability of Pacific peoples and societies, with its outcomes measured in terms of performance and appropriate behaviour in the multiple contexts in which they have to live. The primary goal of education, therefore, is to ensure that all Pacific students are successful and that they all become fully participating members of their groups, societies, and the global community.

Education, or the Tree of Opportunity, is firmly rooted in the cultures of Pacific societies. The strengths and advantages it gains from its root source will allow it to grow strong and healthy, and further permit the
incorporation of foreign or external elements that can be grafted on without changing its fundamental root sources or the identity of each tree. It can accommodate the best of both old and new, and can bear different fruits and be useful for a variety of purposes without destroying its roots or the new grafted elements.

Sustainable, self-help, and self-managed education in the Pacific imply control and direction by Pacific people so that they own the process.
Preface

Cliff Benson, Director, Institute of Education, The University of the South Pacific

The “Tree of Opportunity” is an anthology of papers presented at a colloquium entitled Re-Thinking Pacific Education, held at the University of the South Pacific from April 25 – 27, 2001.

The colloquium was funded by the New Zealand Overseas Development Agency (NZODA) and was mounted in conjunction with the Victoria University of Wellington, under the umbrella of a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of the South Pacific and the Victoria University of Wellington.

The colloquium brought together 18 Pacific educators to re-think the values, assumptions, and beliefs underlying schooling (formal education) in Oceania. They shared views on what they believed to be the main issues and challenges facing education in Oceania. They also began to explore new directions for education and development; directions which might prove more meaningful to Oceanic people to complement the models introduced from the Western world.

The first group of papers deals with general issues common to many Pacific Island nations, the second group focuses on education in specific nations in the region, and the last three papers discuss Pacific education in New Zealand.

Cliff Benson

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The main purpose of this paper is to examine Pacific education today and to raise questions about why the reforms in education and the larger society that have been instituted in the last thirty years or so have not succeeded in creating the kinds of societies Pacific peoples wish for themselves and their children. The paper does not attempt to provide any definitive answers; it offers instead avenues that could be explored by the Colloquium of Pacific educators on “Re-Thinking Pacific Education” as bases from which to usefully analyse the present systems and their distinctive values, beliefs, and knowledge systems, which have helped them to survive harsh terrain and inhospitable environments to create sustainable societies that have lasted more than a thousand years. Some of the strategies, institutions, and processes developed and mastered by Pacific peoples might well provide some answers to the challenges faced by Pacific peoples today and may provide possible pathways into the future.

Definitions

“Education” is a term that is defined in many ways but as a preliminary definition, Thaman’s (1999, pp. 1-2) definitions of education and schooling will be used. She defines “education” as “an introduction to worthwhile learning” and “schooling” as “worthwhile learning that is organised and institutionalised”. This sense of schooling is similar to what is referred to as “formal” education, which is used here to refer to structured and institutionalised education, which usually means, in most countries, basic and compulsory education at the primary and secondary levels, but could also include post-secondary education and training, leading to some form of formal accreditation and certification. “Non-formal” education is used here to refer to any organised education
and training which is conducted outside the formal education sector, and usually means short-term training for specific targets in specific contexts. It is often delivered through the distance education mode. Informal education refers to the resources, both physical and human, that are available in any country and can be utilised for educational purposes. Examples are natural resources, cultural institutions such as museums and libraries, the mass media, and people.

All of these forms of education that are found in the Pacific region today derive their meaning from Western culture and traditions and are usually different in their conceptions from what education traditionally means in the cultures and communities of the Pacific. While Pacific traditional education is also “worthwhile learning”, it is largely informal, contextualised, task-specific, practical, interactive, inter-personal, and life-long. “Basic” education is usually taken to mean formal compulsory primary and secondary education and its achievements are usually defined and measured in terms of basic literacy and numeracy skills. In traditional education, basic education includes the life-long learning of essential values, knowledge, and life-skills, and cultural literacy, which is needed for the survival and development of individuals and their communities. Basic education, as used in this paper, encompasses both meanings.

In the context of globalisation today and the changes it has wrought in societies round the world, what is basic for individuals and national development has changed in many developing and developed countries. For an individual to take advantage of the opportunities for employment and self-realisation, and for a nation to use its human potential to the full, more than literacy and numeracy skills are required. The Delors Report, “Learning, The Treasure Within” (Delors, 1996), with its identified four pillars of education – learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together, learning to live with others; and learning to be – is an attempt to define the ideal basics of education. However, despite a seeming universal consensus, the fact remains that what is considered basic education is essentially for each country to define for itself and its people.
Background

The Dakar Framework for Action (World Education Forum, 2000), arising from Education for All (EFA) + 10 Review, is a document signifying the collective commitment by the international community to the attainment of six educational goals:

- expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children
- ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality
- ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs
- achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults
- eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality
- improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills.

The priority given to the achievement of these six educational goals at Dakar and at other EFA world forums stems from long-held Western values and beliefs that “Education is a fundamental human right. It is the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries, and, thus, an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are affected by rapid globalisation” (World Declaration 1990). Such notions derive their legitimacy in modern times from the Charter of the United Nations, which declares in its Preamble: “WE THE
PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948) also begins its Preamble by declaring that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family “is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”, principles which were formalised in its articles.

The belief in the equality and rights of individuals, including the right to education, comes from a long tradition of liberal thinking in the West, with philosophers such as Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey, who promoted “democracy” as a socio-political organising principle through which the state authority provides the prerequisites for the free self-determination of individuals. The process includes the removal of social inequalities and the creation of equal opportunities for participation. Democracy in this sense dismantles social power differences through the “democratisation” of every aspect of life, so that all people are equally able to make decisions affecting their own lives.

International development emerged as one of the strategies employed to achieve equal rights between men and women and between prosperous nations and poor countries. It was and is actively promoted within the framework of “democratic” principles of individual self-determination and equal rights and opportunities. The principles of good governance, transparency, and accountability have been added in recent years, as has the notion of “sustainability”, which has remained largely fixated on environmental resources and management. It was, therefore, in the 1950s and the post-war World War II period of reconstruction that Western developmental paradigms came into being. Western and Western-educated economic planners became convinced that aid-based strategic planning would enable developing countries to bridge the gap that separated them from the industrialised world. High-income nations
committed themselves to monetary and technical aid channelled through United Nations (UN) agencies, and later through direct bilateral programmes, based on the theory that this aid would foster economic growth that would trickle down to the masses. Neoclassical economic theorists and planners argued that this strategy would ultimately benefit the poor and transform the economies of developing countries.

If we examine the policy and planning documents of the UN and other international organisations, bilateral aid agencies, regional institutions, national and sectoral strategic and corporate plans, these notions are repeated throughout. The World Bank’s Pacific Regional Strategy (2000, p. 27) sets the overall framework, which declares that “fighting poverty is the central mission of the Bank and is at the core of its Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) in the region”.

The New Zealand Official Development Assistance in its Programme Profiles (1999-2000, p. 6) states that its principal purpose is to “achieve lasting improvements in the living conditions of present and future generations of men, women and children of developing countries, especially the poor”. Similar targets have been set by the Department for International Development (DFID), the British government department responsible for promoting development and the reduction of poverty, in its Pacific Region strategy paper (1999, p. 9). The main DFID task in the region is “how to best effect DFID’s central aim of eliminating poverty through sustainable development and, more specifically, through the promotion of:

• policies and actions which promote sustainable livelihoods
• better education, health and opportunities for poor people
• protection and better management of the natural and physical environment”.

These same priorities are, then, adopted at the regional and national levels. Tonga, in its latest Draft National Strategic Plan 7 (Government of Tonga, 2001, pp. 14-15), lists the following objectives:

• efficient and well-structured Government sector, with the qualities of good governance and accountability
• efficient well-structured state owned enterprises (public facilities)
• well-maintained physical infrastructure
• sound and encouraging environment for the development and increased involvement of the private sector in economic activity
• development benefits being distributed equitably
• well-educated and skilled labour force, and healthy population
• low crime and guaranteed national security, and,
• stable macro economic environment with reduced reliance on official foreign assistance.


By 2005 Kiribati will have achieved a significant increase in real per capita incomes, along with steady growth in employment. Within the region, Kiribati will be among the leading countries in gaining improvements in education, health, environmental protection, and social indicators. Public sector reforms will have raised productivity of the civil service, together with customer service standards and managerial accountability. Through structural reform, Kiribati will have established an effective enabling environment to sustain the significant growth which it aims to achieve in private sector output and employment.

At the sectoral level, educational strategies also echo the same over-riding priorities. The global Education for All initiative, co-sponsored and convened by UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank, that was launched in March, 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand is an example of one such strategy, which is being promoted by the world community to not only hasten the development process but also as a mechanism for distribution of its benefits. The Dakar Framework for Action, which arose from the Education for All +10 Review, is the latest attempt to mobilise international commitment to the achievement of these ideals. The University of the South Pacific Strategic Plan (1998), at the
regional level, talks about the same issues: quality, principles of good governance such as accountability and transparency, corporatisation of public sector institutions, sustainable developments/environmental management, and expansion of opportunities at all levels, including higher education. Samoa’s Corporate Plan for Education (Government of Samoa, 2000 p. 7) identified similar key values on which to base its delivery service: equity, quality, relevancy, and efficiency.

In fact, if the policy and strategic planning documents from these different organisations are closely scrutinised, the same key concepts emerge time and time again:

• poverty alleviation
• good governance
• efficient services
• expanding opportunities
• equitable access to quality education and health services, and employment
• economic growth, and
• environmental management and sustainability.

These are the defining principles of modern development as we understand and practice it today.

In education, the principles defining educational development are the same and can be summed up in the embracing concepts of:

• quality
• equity, and
• sustainability, which subsume under their broad umbrellas other associated defining concepts, such as,
• access, and
• efficiency.

It is not particularly surprising or disappointing to find that Pacific national visions and development and educational priorities are defined by the same principles and notions found in the international institutions’ and donor agencies’ strategic and policy documents. Most, if not all, of the national strategic plans and educational corporate plans found in the Pacific today were prepared with technical expertise and funding
provided by donors and international organisations. The development as well as the education paradigms adopted by governments within the region are Western-derived and are based on Western values, beliefs, and knowledge systems. Pacific Islanders who authored or assisted in the preparations of such plans and are responsible for their implementation, monitoring and supervision were Western educated and have partially or wholly internalised Western values, beliefs, and knowledge systems.

Dakar plan of action and education in the Pacific region

The six goals identified at Dakar are variations of the priority goals of: early childhood care and development; universal access to primary education; learning achievement and outcomes; adult literacy; training in essential skills; and education for better living; identified by the Education for All (EFA) Conference held at Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, which were to have been achieved by 2000. The fact that they have re-emerged ten years later under different guises at the Dakar Conference point to the fact that they have yet to be achieved worldwide. The Chung (2000) assessment of the Pacific’s progress and achievement of these EFA goals, commissioned by UNESCO, commended the laudable progress made by Pacific member states at all levels of education despite severe economic setbacks in most countries. Chung attributed the successes to the commitment of governments, strong donor support, and the small-scale but important investments made by NGOs.

Indeed, the last decade has seen some quite radical reforms taking place in Pacific education. They were driven mainly by two imperatives: (a) that education is the key instrument in the achievement of modernisation, economic prosperity, political stability, and social cohesiveness; and (b) that education is a human right. Pacific governments and donors have invested substantially in education in attempts to widen access, reduce inequalities, improve quality, and increase the number of better-educated and skilled human resources needed for development. More schools have been built and equipped in both rural and urban areas. More teachers have been trained for primary and secondary schools, and in-service training programmes have upgraded the qualifications and competencies of practising teachers. New vocational and technical programmes have been established and more support is given to non-
formal education programmes. Early childhood education is becoming accepted and participation is increasing. Revised and new curricula more relevant and appropriate to Pacific contexts and individual needs are being developed and taught in schools. More books, equipment, and classroom resources to support new curriculum changes have been put in schools. Improved school and national management systems are in place. New assessment procedures that reflect the new directions in curriculum development have been adopted, and newly-formulated educational corporate plans are being implemented. These are all attempts to improve access, equity, quality, relevancy, and the efficiency and effectiveness of education in the belief that an effective education system will provide the tools necessary for societal development and transformation.

Although Pacific achievements in education are fair in comparison with many parts of the developing world, access to primary education is still a huge challenge in Melanesia, and limits access to and participation at other levels and forms of formal and non-formal education. Other countries that claim near or universal access to primary education experience limited access at other levels, from early childhood education, through to tertiary education, vocational and technical training, and non-formal education. Despite improvements in the services to rural areas and disadvantaged communities and groups, there are still huge disparities in many countries in educational opportunities and achievements for rural communities, women and girls, and those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. Many schools are still poorly endowed in terms of school facilities and support resources; a high percentage of teachers either have low educational qualifications or are untrained or both. Literacy and numeracy achievements as measured by various tests, such as PILLS, are lower or poorer than expected. Dropouts, pushouts, and wastage in the system in terms of repeaters continue to be high. Unemployment among youths, alienated and disaffected by their formal education, is increasing at alarming rates in societies where at least 50% of the population are under 21 years of age. The school curricula, despite attempts at vocationalising, remain largely academic, inappropriate, and irrelevant to the needs of Pacific students and their communities. Schools and systems continue to be inefficient and ineffective. The quality, therefore, of education, despite
its purported importance in the region, the high priority accorded it in development plans, the significant investments by governments, donors and communities, remains the major challenge in all Pacific countries today.

The links between education and development

In tandem with concerns over the perceived low quality of education achievement has been equal disquiet with the seeming failure of education systems to address the larger issues confronting Pacific nations today, issues brought about by modernisation and development and the attempts by Pacific nations to become members of the global economy and community. The reforms in education either followed or came hand in hand with wide-ranging economic reforms and strategic development planning, which have had various impacts on Pacific societies. As in the education sector, in spite of heavy investments by national governments in human and economic developments and the reputedly highest per capita level of external assistance in the world, economic reforms and development processes at the national and sectoral levels in the Pacific region have not fared better. The failures of development and economic reforms have been documented by various studies and reports (ADB 1990, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1998; Cox, 1999; Emberson-Bain, 1994; UNDP, 1999b, 1997).

The critics of such reforms have pointed to the unequal effects they have on the various players in Pacific communities. The assumption that the global-market is a “level playing field” is proving otherwise for small, vulnerable, powerless nations, such as those of the Pacific, and the odds against their benefiting from such reforms are high indeed. It would seem that the real beneficiaries are the powerful multinational corporations who have already usurped the sovereignty of many nations and taken on the roles hitherto assumed to be those of sovereign states but without the necessary checks and balances. With globalisation also comes new power relations. The downsizing or “right-sizing” of the public sector, as one Prime Minister puts it, and the promotion of private sector development have created new power blocks within political and civil society, with the new affluent business class assuming or usurping the roles previously held by traditional leadership and modern states,
often resulting in reduction of services to unprofitable areas, such as outer islands and rural areas, and user and higher fees for services. A counter movement within civil society, therefore, has developed, which is calling on governments to strengthen their responsibilities for basic services, such as to health and education, in order to protect the weakest members of society by subsidising schools fees, and removing VAT from basic food items.

Globalisation has brought unprecedented changes to the region. Pacific exports bring poor and erratic prices, and imports are costly, including foodstuff and beverages. Trade imbalances are typical and debt levels are high. Development initiatives require high government spending on infrastructure, and plant and human resource development. Under and unemployment are far higher than statistics show, whilst at the same time advertising and television are undermining local values and stimulating new and unrealistic consumer expectations. New technologies have further widened the gap between the rich and poor nations, and the new economic policies have widened the gap between rich and poor Pacific Islanders. These changes have brought increasing urbanisation with its attendant problems of land and housing; squatting; social dislocation and disorder; deteriorating law and order enforcement; increasing incidence of domestic violence, child abuse, prostitution, and drug abuse; youth alienation and a suicide rate which is reputed to be one of the highest in the world; fierce competition for services such as education and health; uncontrolled population growth; brain drain; increasing uncertainty about identity; rising poverty; and increasing corruption in government and business. Thus, far from being reduced, poverty is growing as a consequence of the social disorder and unemployment; inequalities are increasing and new forms have been created. Environmental degradation, such as pollution and deforestation, is increasing, not to mention the looming threat of global warming.

It seems that neither economic nor educational reforms in the region have brought about the desired benefits and outcomes. It is perhaps of small comfort to know that educational and economic reforms worldwide have equally dismal records. The UNDP Human Development Reports of 1999 and 2000 described some of the significant gains that have been made world-wide but admitted that severe inequalities remain
today, despite decades of development programmes aimed at reducing those very disparities and despite efforts to shift emphasis away from economic targets to human-focused development and away from top-down imposed development that is donor driven to participatory partnership and recipient-owned types of development. Discrimination by gender, ethnic group, race, and age continues all over the world.

Both reports warned of the threats posed by globalisation to human security in both rich and poor countries: there is increasing financial volatility and economic insecurity from the risks of global financial markets; job and income insecurities from dislocations from economic and corporate restructuring, global competition, and dismantling of social institutions that afforded protection; growing health insecurity with the global spread of HIV/AIDS; disquieting cultural insecurity, which threatens cultural diversity and identities; rising personal insecurity from world-wide illicit trades, which contribute to increasing violence and crimes both global and local; environmental insecurity from chronic environmental degradation and gross consumption patterns by the rich, giving rise to depleted stocks, less bio-diversity and fewer forests; personal insecurity both from rising social tensions which threaten political stability and community cohesion and also from powerful independent military companies and mercenary armies, which threaten both world and national securities.

Thus, today, all around the world, not just in the Pacific, the prevailing form of development, under which educational reforms are subsumed, has become contested territory: by the developing countries which have become poorer as a consequence of globalisation; by indigenous peoples, who have become endangered species within their own countries; by feminists who have experienced at first hand the destructive power of male dominance; by communities who find their resources and very livelihoods taken over and controlled by faceless and distant supranational corporations who are accountable to no-one but themselves and their own agendas, and by the increasing privatisation of public utilities and user-pay development strategies; by nations whose sovereignties have been eroded and usurped by these very same corporations and private interests; and, not least, by teachers, educators, researchers, and concerned individuals searching for alternatives.
The assigned roles of education

Because human societies, including Pacific nations, believe in the transforming capacity of education, they have accepted its elevation to a human right and need. It is the institution through which individuals develop the basic knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills that they must have to become fully functional members of their societies, and the means also through which other basic human needs are met. The provisions, for instance, of safe drinking water, basic health care services, and secure shelters can improve the quality of people’s lives only to the extent that their education and understanding allows them. It also plays a key role in sustaining and accelerating overall development by providing the higher level knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that societies today need everywhere to manage complex technical and scientific projects, to further human knowledge in pure and applied areas, (which are necessary for further development), to achieve a balance between human population and natural resources, and to maintain equilibrium in the fast-changing world. These roles usually relate to the furtherance of economic and intellectual development. The other main roles of education assigned by societies, which are cultural and moral development, are often ignored or neglected within the formal education system but are critical to the achievement of social cohesiveness and political stability, the pre-requisites for development, including economic and intellectual development.

Given the key roles of education, the demand for education in most countries, including the Pacific region, goes well beyond the provision of a few years of formal schooling and is accepted as a lifelong process. The participation, therefore, of all human beings in education, through the utilisation of the formal, non-formal, informal, and traditional processes, resources, and institutions, is a crucial and critical issue for all countries.

Measuring outcomes

Because education is thought to be the main instrument in promoting human and societal development and because of the enormous investments in education to bring this about, measuring educational
Performance to assess its ability to deliver effective and efficient services has been of particular interest and a major concern of countries, particularly of policymakers who must account for and justify rising expenditure. Educational indicators have been proposed as the means for monitoring the performance of education systems and as mechanisms for improving or reforming them. They are designed to provide information about the state of an education system. They act as an early warning device that something may be going wrong, or provide reassurance that everything is functioning smoothly. However, if something is wrong, the indicators themselves do not provide the diagnosis or prescribe the remedy; they are simply suggestive of the need for action. Most educational indicators developed and used by the international community and adopted at national levels in the Pacific are based on the input-process-output model of education. Traditionally, educational measurements have produced a rather limited number of context variables, a large number of input measures, and few data on educational processes, student achievement and educational outcomes.

Examples of input measurements are enrolment figures, public current expenditure as a percentage of GNP, the number of teachers and their qualifications, the number who are trained, and the teacher-pupil ratio. Process indicators are usually regarded as measures of the internal features of school that link inputs to outcomes, such as organisational arrangements or the quality of teaching and learning. Outcome indicators that are often used are literacy and numeracy achievements, and school attainment. The indicators used in the UNDP (1999b) and the Chung (2000) reports of educational progress in the Pacific in relation to the EFA goals are mostly input and output measures, with a few process indicators that attempt to measure system and school effectiveness and efficiency such as survival, repetition, and drop-out rates.

One of the main criticisms of the input-process-output model of education is the assumption that the inputs into and the processes within formal schooling are the only variables that contribute to or determine educational outcomes. This model ignores the larger contexts in which formal schooling occurs and the complex nature of the process. There is no simplistic direct link between input, process, and outcome and, therefore, the assumption that manipulating input and process variables
will automatically result in changes in outcomes is naïve. It also ignores the contributions of non-formal, informal, and traditional education and limits what counts as “education” to the narrow academic programmes provided by formal education and schooling.

Educational indicators are not the only ones used to measure educational performance. Attempts have also been made to measure the relationship between educational outputs and economic, social, and political outcomes. The link between education and economic outcomes is based on the human capital theory. In this theory, formal schooling is the primary mechanism for developing the initial stock of knowledge and skills that entry-level workers bring into the labour market.

A number of criticisms have been levied against the notion of human capital and its relationship to formal schooling. As with educational indicators, these criticisms suggest that the relationship between education and labour market outcomes is more complex than the simple tenets suggested by the human capital theory. This theory ignores the qualitative difference in the learning that takes place within schools, irrespective of years of schooling and the quality of skills learned that might apply at work. It also ignores the fact that schools are social institutions and their primary purpose is to socialise individuals by developing a wide range of both cognitive and non-cognitive abilities and other traits, including proper attitudes and values such as respect for authority, proper behaviours such as punctuality, and even appropriate manners of speech and modes of dress, that will help to make them more productive workers in the large bureaucratic institutions in which most will work (Bowles and Gintis 1976).

The most fundamental and radical challenge to the human capital role of schooling, however, comes from those who view schooling as the primary mechanism for reproducing the unequal economic and social relations in the larger society, which accounts for the unequal outcomes of education. In this perspective, large social class differences lead to large differences in schooling, such that lower-class students receive less, and qualitatively different, schooling than do upper-class students in order to help prepare them for different positions in the job hierarchy (Weis 1988). Research also shows that individuals of different social
class, race and ethnicity, native language, and gender may have quite
different labour market experiences, even if they possess the same
educational qualifications.

Since most educational reforms have been predicated on the need to
better align the performance of the education system with the economy,
much attention has been paid to studies and research on the relationships
between educational outputs and economic outcomes. However, schools
as social institutions are seen to be instrumental also in developing the
attributes that promote social and political variables, such as poverty,
health, crime, and political participation, and these “outcomes”, as
previously argued, are often ignored in formal schooling.

Indicators and measures of educational performance are based on
assumptions about the nature of schools and the processes of schooling,
the aims of education, the exercise of control, and the underlying social
relationships in the domains of policy, practice, outside expertise,
and the wider public. The issue that is critical here is that indicators
emerge out of value-systems and are designed to measure what are
considered to be important educational goals within specific social and
value systems. Schools, as social systems, operate according to certain
basic ideas about what is proper, right, and just. Bryk and Hermanson
(1994), for example, argue that the structure of American education is
largely designed to offer opportunities for individual self-expression,
evidence for which can be found in the broad and diverse high school
curricula, in students’ right to exercise choice in the study programmes
and teachers’ demands to control subject matter and how it is taught.
This educational premise has its source in the basic American cultural
value of expressive individualism, which influences both the nature of
students’ engagement in schooling and teachers’ willingness to expend
effort on their work. Bryk and Hermanson warned, therefore, of the
undesirability of importing an indicator model designed for specific
social and cultural contexts and using it as an appropriate model in
other contexts. They cite the example of comparing American and
Japanese school systems. It is argued that the Japanese have larger class
sizes and yet they still do better than American schools, a conclusion
which ignored the cultural factors at work. In fact, there are profound
differences between the two countries with respect to individual and
collective values, individual rights, and social responsibilities. To make the American system more like the Japanese would require more than just manipulating conventional instruments of educational policy. It would entail fundamentally changing its value structures, which describes exactly what occurred in the Pacific with the introduction of formal Western schooling.

The failure of education in the Pacific can be attributed in large measure to the imposition of an alien system designed for Western social and cultural contexts, which are underpinned by quite different values. The indicators which are used in the Pacific to measure educational performance at the regional and national levels have largely been imported from elsewhere and very little effort has been made to contextualise them. It is often assumed that they are value-free and that they are appropriate to the contexts in which they are applied. To a great extent this assumption is true in the sense that Pacific countries have imported a Western-model of education and adopted it without due consideration to the contexts in which it is applied nor to the value systems of communities in the region. The indicators have measured basically the success of Pacific countries in implementing a system of education that is based on the same value systems as those from which the indicators were borrowed.

Most research studies, therefore, in respect of education and development in the region, have also concentrated largely on documenting the relationships between investments in education, educational attainment, and participation, with achievement of economic growth and goals and the benefits that can be reaped from such investments. In more recent years, researches have also sought to establish clear links between education, economic growth, and the achievement of social and human development goals, such as population and health, natural resource management, and food security, but the development indicators that are used to measure progress and achievement in education and economic growth reflect a preoccupation with numbers, which relates back to the value of individualism. The Human Development Index (HDI), for instance, is based on three indicators: longevity as measured by life expectancy at birth; educational attainment, as measured by a combination of adult literacy
(two-thirds weight) and the combined first, second and third-level gross enrolment ratio (one-third weight); and standard of living as measured by real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, which is expressed in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP). Similarly, in discussions of educational quality, the indicators which are often cited relate to enrolment figures, adult literacy rates, level of attainment, number of schools, number of teachers, qualifications of teachers, investments in education in relation to the national recurrent expenditure and GDP, material resources, and drop-out and completion rates. The values and qualities which are not marketable become invisible and are not counted or acknowledged by economic and development formulas. The values and qualities which are required to develop good citizenship and whole human beings, for instance, are equally ignored because they cannot be measured or are difficult to measure. Thus, education in the Pacific continues to be narrowly defined and academic, focusing on promoting only factual, analytic, and numerative intelligence and continuing to ignore other forms of intelligence, such as linguistic, spatial, athletic, intuitive, emotional, practical, interpersonal, and musical intelligence, to name a few.

The results, as previously discussed, demonstrate the continuing high costs of educational reforms and the diminishing returns on investments. The conventional response has been to continue to manipulate the input and process variables, such as increasing funding to different sectors of education, to improve the alignment of education and economic development, to train more teachers or hire better qualified teachers, to develop more appropriate and relevant curricula, or to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of management systems in attempts to improve educational outputs.

**Interrogating basic assumptions**

The continuing failure of such interventions are not, it is argued, due to inefficiency, lack of human capacity, and strong commitment to good governance, unconducive economic environment, poor resource base, and political instability, or combinations thereof, which are often cited by research and study documents. The relevancy and appropriateness of the value systems on which these systems are based have not been
sufficiently interrogated. There are two issues to be considered here. The first is that an adopted model is often applied on a deficit basis, since those who borrow it usually have an imperfect understanding of its processes and underlying values. However, in another sense the failures reflect fundamental flaws in the paradigms themselves. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is timely to re-consider the pertinence of the core values underpinning Western development and educational paradigms to Pacific societies to provide some understanding of the inherent contradictions between avowed goals and outcomes.

As mentioned previously, Western democratic principles are based on the assumption that the individual forms the basic unit of society and that his rights and freedoms are universally subscribed to, as witness their enshrinement in the UN Charter and Declaration of Human Rights. The various economic, political, and social theories that inform today’s dominant development paradigms are underpinned by the same assumptions. Thus, the theory of the market economy is based on individualism, competition, consumerism, and growth, but within these notions lie the seeds of contradictions, for these values, by their nature, breed the very inequalities and unsustainabilities that development is designed to alleviate and eradicate. In fact, the whole development institution is fraught with contradictions. For example, on the one hand, developing countries are urged to prioritise human development and invest heavily in education as the key instrument in achieving equitable and sustainable development, but the very development which education supports creates exploitation, dependency, and the international market forces that promote growth that is jobless and unsustainable. In the market-driven economy, there will always be winners and losers, and a few will benefit at the expense of many. Growth is predicated on ever-increasing consumerism and tougher competition, which will devour the world’s scarce resources, deplete and degrade the environment, and impoverish more people unless, as Handy (1998, p. 113), the British management guru, argues, the “Doctrine of Enough”, or what he calls a “Decent Sufficiency”, or, more academically, a “Theory of Limits” is voluntarily applied, but that assumes values and a philosophy of distribution that are not part of the market economy. As Taylor (2000, p. 5) puts it, “there is no adequate or appropriate value system and philosophy within the market system for the distribution of resources or
The important issue here is about values, beliefs, assumptions, and ideologies. Feminists, critiquing the failure of reform policies and strategies to effectively address gender issues in education, have come to the conclusion that having firm political commitments to the ideals of human rights, including gender rights; putting in place appropriate legislation such as legislating for compulsory education at the primary level; allocating sufficient resources to support initiatives; adopting affirmative action to ensure that gaps are addressed, and increasing resources to sectors and groups which need them; putting in place monitoring systems and institutions to ensure compliance and equity and parity of outcomes; establishing quota systems to ensure that opportunities are provided to needy groups; developing and implementing gender policies at all levels of the system; making gender inequality visible; reforming the curriculum; and developing the AICE model of equal opportunity (access, inclusive, climate, and empowerment) are not enough to achieve gender equity. In Canada, despite having implemented reforms which include the development of non-sexist learning materials, gender-fair curriculum content, access for girls to non-traditional subjects, role modelling programmes, and the promotion of women to administrative positions, gender disparities remain strong (Larkin, 1994). Piussi (1990) argues that these interventions are not sufficient. The liberation of women from male oppression needs more than claiming rights for women in the context of a policy and pedagogy of equal opportunities, although this stance has progressed from a paradigm of equal treatment to one of equality defined as parity of results. What is needed, she claims, is the bi-sexualisation of the social and symbolic order by developing a pedagogy of sexual difference, which means creating for females a symbolic and social order of women with a tradition of their own, a female genealogy in the “neuter’ world of production and transmission of knowledge. It must be recognised that there are two sexes, but this difference has not been registered historically in the symbolism of culture or social order. The symbolism has been structured as if only one sex, the male sex, existed.

In a similar fashion, the indigenous peoples of the Pacific need to create their own pedagogy and symbolic orders, their own sources
of authority, mediating structures, and appropriate standards in
development and education, which are rooted in their own Pacific
values, beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, processes, and practices, and
particularly in those values which support sustainability and equity of
benefits, not necessarily measured in economic terms. Konai Thaman,
one of the Pacific’s most eminent educators and poets, has, throughout
her career, repeatedly called for such constructs and has done a great
deal of work herself in these areas. The work of Smith (1999) in her
book “Decolonising Methodologies” recognises the importance of
liberating ourselves from others’ constructions of ourselves and the
need to be free to tell our own stories and name our world, to become
actors rather than subjects of others’ visions and developmental goals.
Other Pacific Islanders have taken up the call, such as Tupuola (1993,
1998), Sanga (2000a and 2000b), Nabobo (1995), to name a few,
and not just from motives of deconstructing colonial images, but in
genuine attempts to find alternatives to the Western developmental and
educational paradigms that are now in vogue. Much interesting work is
currently being undertaken in various parts of the Pacific, particularly
by Hawaiian and Māori academics. The University of the South Pacific,
which represents 12 member states, is only now beginning to consider
seriously how it could reorient its research and teaching programmes to
reflect some of these concerns and make them mainstream. The concept
of the Colloquium of Pacific Educators to Re-Think Pacific Education
was born out of those concerns.

It is believed that, unless attempts are made to identify the purposes of
development and education and what they mean in the contexts of the
Pacific, development and education in the region and their benefits will
continue to be unsustainable and inequitable. In other words, a vision
of development that clearly spells out the kinds of societies Pacific
peoples wish for themselves and their children is needed, and such a
vision cannot be better informed than by the fundamental core values
of Pacific cultures, which have not fundamentally changed despite the
enormous changes in their material and knowledge cultures and in their
political, economic, and social institutions. The incongruence between
Pacific core values and those underpinning imported development and
educational paradigms is in large measure responsible for much of the
turmoil the Pacific is now experiencing at every level of its societies.
It is argued that the Pacific need, first of all, is to know where it is going before it can decide on how to get there for, as the Cheshire Cat reminded Alice, if she did not know where she was going, it really did not matter how she got there. Handy (1998), in talking about the market made the point that “unless and until we work out what the purpose is we can’t measure the results. Without a clear definition of desired results, any market ... would have to focus on the one thing that could be measured: the costs or inputs”. Competing on costs, however, does not necessarily guarantee the best outputs. The same argument applies to most public service institutions. Where outputs cannot be measured, the competition has to focus on inputs, and the cheapest hospital or school is not necessarily the best. A similar situation exists in Pacific development and education. There is, in fact, little interrogation of the values underscoring development and education nor of the purposes of development or education, which proceed beyond the efficacy of achieving growth.

Taylor (2000, p. 3) commented that development is expected to bring about fundamental social transformation at the level where it counts, in terms of social relations, in terms of relations between men and women, rich and poor, and in terms of relations at other levels of society. Tonga is one of the few countries in the region which has made an attempt to identify the values that should inform its development programmes. Its national vision makes it clear that:

development covers not only goods and services (material standards) but also the opportunity to choose and achieve a quality of life that is valuable, satisfying and valued. It also means that the choices include a different style of development, a different path, based on the realities of values, resources and aspirations of Tongan society which may be different from those of developed countries but not lower in quality. It is national development based on human and sustainable development. (Government of Tonga 2001, p. 3)

Unfortunately after such a promising, innovative beginning, it proceeded to adopt the same development strategies that others have prescribed
for them. So perhaps Lewis Carroll is mistaken after all and the means are just as important as the ends. There has to be consistency in the values underlying both.

**Conclusion**

The challenges that the Pacific faces today can be reduced for argument's sake into two fundamental issues: the value systems which underpin political, economic, educational, and civil institutions, which largely determine their visions, structures, processes, programmes and outcomes; and, secondly, the pernicious and inherent inequalities which they breed, whose outcomes are poverty for the powerless and the marginalisation of society, which in most societies means women and children. Unless the Western-dominated values which are enshrined in these institutions are changed, much work will be wasted: efforts to alter the power structure in order to create more “democratic” forms of government and to encourage equity of participation, opportunity, choice, and access to resources; efforts to develop appropriate policy frameworks and promote good governance to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of activities and outcomes; efforts to establish institutions and organisations with appropriate and adequate resources to implement programmes — all these efforts will continue to remain ineffective and the inequalities they were meant to address will continue to fragment civil society.

It has been argued that the Western-derived developmental and educational paradigms which have been adopted by most Pacific countries have failed to achieve their expected outcomes. There is an urgent need, therefore, to explore alternatives based on other value systems. For it is from values and belief systems that social and cultural groups construct their world, create meaning, develop rules that govern behaviour, and erect the institutions that formalise and transform those abstract worlds into concrete realities. Values are, however, human constructs and the rules, regulations, laws, policies, and institutions that they engender are also human constructs and are not immutable but, like all other human constructs, can be deconstructed and changed as contexts and circumstances alter. At the dawn of the new millennium, Pacific countries do have a choice of pathways. The Colloquium could
be the beginning of the construction of such alternative futures.

References


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CHAPTER 2

Towards Cultural Democracy in Pacific Education: An Imperative for the 21st Century

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I take the general definition of the problem that we are here to address from Dr Taufe’ulungaki’s preamble to the background of our meeting: that, despite heavy investment by Pacific Island governments and external donors, improved access at all levels of formal education, better contextualisation of the curricula, improvement in the training of teachers, educational reforms in the region, like that in other parts of the world, have had a disappointing record. The quality of education, as measured by various international agencies, remains low and the effectiveness of the education system is poor. Some of you may wish to question the details of the above statement in the context of your own country but, for the purposes of my presentation, I take the above statement to be a true reflection of the state of formal education in our region.

Our tasks in the next three days are: to identify the main issues and challenges facing Pacific education; to assess the degree to which current education systems are addressing these issues; and to plan future activities that could lead to more appropriate and meaningful alternative models for future educational improvement in our region.

I would like to focus today on two key issues which I have formulated in terms of questions: 1) What is education and why do we educate; and 2) What is the role of formal education or schooling in the overall achievement of education in Pacific Island Nations (PINs)? Put another way, two issues which I would like to address are: the purpose of education and the significance of schooling for Pacific people. I do not apologise for my use of the term Pacific rather than the more fashionable Oceania; Pacific is my preferred term as it better reflects my agenda today.
From the outset I wish to suggest that any discussion about education by Pacific people is necessarily autobiographic and about culture. This is because most of us are products of our learning experiences in formal educational institutions as well as outside of these, in our homes, communities, and countries. I believe that what is happening in education in our region is necessarily a broader reflection of what is happening to us — people who have had to translate foreign ideas which we have learned as a result of our personal and cultural histories, and the complexity of conceptualising these ideas in our varied and changing contexts. Most Pacific people, including us, are continually engaged in the translation of foreign educational and other ideas into their own languages in the course of their working lives. Educational officials, principals, teachers, students and, in some countries, parents and guardians regularly have to try and express their ideas about learning, knowledge, teaching, assessing etcetera in a language that is foreign to them. This exercise would be easier if all discourse about meanings was concerned with the meanings of language words and not with what Cohen calls “culture words” (Cohen, 1963, p. 21), where meanings are discussed on a conceptual plane rather than a verbal one. My presentation, therefore, is not only about Pacific education, but it is also about me and the different cultural sources that have moulded my view of education and culture as well as express it.

It is necessary for me to provide some stipulative definitions of key terms which I shall be using; first, education for my purposes is defined as worthwhile learning. Worthwhile learning that is organised and institutionalised constitutes formal education; worthwhile learning that is organised but not institutionalised is non-formal education; and worthwhile learning that is not organised nor institutionalised is informal education. The last two types of learning largely constituted the education systems of Pacific societies before the advent of formal education in the form of schooling. Today, many people speak of formal education as if that is the only important type of education existing in a place. This is unfortunate but understandable. My focus today will be on the formal education system, not because it is the most important, but because it is the most problematic.

Dr. Taufeʻulungaki, in her paper “Where to Now” (2000), has
convincingly explained why PINs have agreed to embark on a program of restructuring and reforms of their economies and, more recently, their education systems. In it she suggests, and I agree with her, that previous attempts at reforming Pacific education have largely failed. I have, on other occasions, suggested that this apparent failure of educational and other so-called reforms in PINs has been due mainly to the wholesale importation of models of development that did not make much sense to the people who were going to be the most affected by these reforms. For the next three days we hope to look critically at our formal education systems in order to arrive at a vision of Pacific education that is both culturally inclusive as well as personally liberating. I say this because of my belief that schooling and the bureaucratic rationality upon which mass education has been based for over a century, are antithetical to Pacific traditional indigenous education.

As well as the underlying assumptions and value underpinnings of formal education, there is also the problem of defining success and failure. We are familiar with the types of indicators which have been used by various people and organisations to judge the success/failure of students as well as schools and education systems. I do not want to go into that in great detail except to say that it is unfortunate that most evaluation of education continues to focus on schools and classrooms rather than the educational bureaucracy. The other day I read the Fiji Education Minister’s lament about the “failure” of Fijian students which was based on statistics, indicating that about 90% of Fijian cohorts that start school in Class I have a 10% chance of reaching Form 7. I suppose that if the purpose of formal education were a pass in the FLSC examination (the precondition for entry to Form 7) then we would have to agree with the Minister that a huge proportion of Fijian students fail. However, if the purpose of schooling is to help students achieve worthwhile learning outcomes, then perhaps the school system would be seen as having failed the students, rather than the students having failed.

Much of the evaluative literature on school success is based on the concept of education as a form of economic investment, a concept that in my view is basically flawed by its pseudo-quantification and commodification. Studies in Africa and in the Asia/Pacific region show
what many of us intuitively know — that most primary school-leavers are in quasi subsistence economic activities, while those who migrate to urban areas are in economically fragile and socially peripheral activities, such as domestic activities, manual labour in factories, or delivering and selling retail goods. The relevance of primary education (often perceived by some as synonymous with basic education) to these occupations as well as to the young people’s aspirations for the future is quite debatable. Research also shows that primary schooling is exclusively premised on its conception as a first step onto a staircase which leads to secondary schooling and to an effective credential for entry into well-paid formal sector employment. By implication, therefore, success in school may be seen as a process by which Pacific young people are extricated from their local communities into what is seen as a superior and external realm.

As you know, many people outside the education sector have deep ambivalence about schooling. Some associate schools with modern wisdom as opposed to the traditional wisdom gained outside school. In many PINs, schools may be technologically powerful but culturally alien to many children. The more schooling they receive the less likely they are to remain members of their village or local community. Even parents see this as a kind of sacrifice and they want schooling to be even better at extracting their children and they want teachers who can best help their children pass exams and move away to towns or, preferably, overseas. Such is the “moral trap” of education, where people are trapped in their own self-defeating formulation, that education is about schooling and that schooling is about getting to the next level.

This dilemma exists because, for over a century now, our formal education has been based on subject curriculum objectives rather than appropriate behaviour and performance, which were deemed necessary for survival in society and were the aims of indigenous education before schools were introduced. Today, our schools continue to reflect the purposes, objectives, and curricula of the formal educational systems of our ex-colonial masters. In these countries, schools have three main functions: to promote economic progress, to transmit culture from one generation to another, and to cultivate children’s moral and intellectual development. These have been referred to as the economic, cultural, and
pedagogic agenda of schooling. Theoretically, the school must address all three at the same time, teachers helping children to grow intellectually and morally by expanding their knowledge and understanding of their cultural heritage. This personal growth then empowers them to build on that heritage, to discover better ways of managing their environments and to generate wealth for themselves and for their societies.

We know, however, that, in practice, in these same countries, but particularly in our own, the school system has fallen short of this ideal synthesis because the economic and cultural agendas of schooling continue to come into conflict. Furthermore, in our case, schools do not consciously transmit our cultural heritages; one of the most unfortunate outcomes of our schooling has been the disappointing lack of knowledge and understanding among school-leavers of the languages as well as of the important knowledge, understandings, and values of their cultures, especially those aspects that are associated with Pacific biodiversity: mental health and spirituality, subsistence economy and ways of making a living, the building arts and architecture, various Pacific crafts, traditional crop and animal husbandry, marine fishing and conservation, and a whole lot of useful knowledge and skills that are now recognised by the international community as preconditions for sustainable development and quality living in our region. More importantly, perhaps, schooling in our region does not reflect the values and ideals of our societies as they do in more developed societies. For example, schooling and educational bureaucracy rely on so-called universal truths and impersonality whereas Pacific indigenous education relies on specific contexts and interpersonal relationships. Schooling promotes individual merit while most Pacific cultures emphasise human relationships and collectivity. Sanga (2000, p. 4), writing about Solomon Islands says that “the extent to which the school represents the multiple cultures of the nation is minimal ...[and] the officially sanctioned values are those that are represented by the school structure, the approved curriculum, the policies, the regulations and the teaching profession” and not those of the cultures from which teachers and students come. This means, he concludes, “that school and education are not necessarily synonymous in the Pacific Islands”.

If, as in Western nations, formal education is closely associated with
the transmission of individualistic, industrial, and scientific cultures, then in PINs schooling should reflect Pacific cultures since the content of all education has value underpinnings that are always associated with a particular cultural agenda as there is no such thing as culture-free education. I define “culture” as a way of life, a definition that, like my definition of education, is derived from Pacific vernacular notions of “life” as all-embracing and interconnected, not easily dissociated from ideas about economy, environment, politics, or indeed education itself. Culture, for me, is an all-embracing framework that helps define particular ways of being and behaving, different types of knowing and knowledge, as well as different ways these are stored, communicated, and shared. In this context, I have always found Lawton’s (1971, p. 1) definition of curriculum to be informative; he says that a curriculum is a selection of the best of a culture, the transmission of which is so important that it is entrusted to specially prepared people— teachers. This view of curriculum is all the more interesting for me since we know that, given the demands of structural reforms in our region, our formal education will continue to mirror reforms in metropolitan countries. Reform consultants are already telling us that our children must also understand so-called global culture and recent advances in new information technology. The current euphoria about cyberspace and its promises for education of various types and descriptions are bound to make issues such as participation and equity even more complex and difficult to deal with. As I speak, the spirit of globalisation is already impacting Pacific education and possibly creating what Bottomley (1995, p. 24) calls the “new geography of inequality”. This is largely because we know that, in most places, access to the sites of power, whether they be law, the media, or education, usually lies with privileged groups; in developed countries, they are usually male, white, and middle class; in the Pacific, they are usually male, urban, and mostly Western educated — a phenomenon that has not been seriously challenged nor changed in most of our countries.

There have been many reasons advanced for why Pacific students under-perform and underachieve in formal education in our region. One that has attracted my attention because I could relate to it to my own personal experiences both as a student and as a teacher is what Professor Angela Little (1995) of the London Institute of Education
referred to as the “cultural gap”, the distance between the expectations of the school curriculum and those of the cultures in which students are socialised. In PINs, this gap also exists between the curriculum and the majority of teachers, raising the question of what or whose knowledge is considered worthwhile to teach and/or learn in our schools?

When mass education in the form of schools was introduced (less than 200 years ago) the assumption was that, in school, individuals should not be treated according to ascribed criteria such as social rank or relationships to others, but “equally” according to “objective” criteria of individual achievement. This principle gave rise to the notion of equality of opportunity which, in the context of the development of the modern nation state, is normally seen to function in three ways:

• in theory, it acts as a selection mechanism for the labour market on the basis of ability
• it acts as a moral principle by selecting students on the basis of a (Western) theory of justice, and
• it acts as a tool of assimilation, providing the means whereby the culturally diverse people of a nation could aspire to and achieve the common prizes offered in industrial society.

In Western, individualistic and industrialised societies, formal education helps create a single measure of personal success, namely the attainment of wealth and status by promotion to professional and senior management positions within corporate and public bureaucracies. Such a perception now provides the background against which most Pacific people perceive the role of schooling within our education systems. However, we know that PINs are generally more collective than individualistic, and most are not industrialised, yet measures of personal success continue to be context-specific. Perhaps there is something in this discrepancy that explains why some students seem to be having difficulties staying in school, an alien place which pushes out students who do not conform and where, in order to be successful, students will need to hang their cultural identities at the school gates and perhaps for the first time be a person with no connections to anyone or anything.
Recent Initiatives

Some of you may be familiar with our modest attempts to address the alienating nature of schooling in our region. Over the past ten years or so, efforts have been made in several PINs to incorporate elements of local cultures into the school curricula as well as the curricula of higher education institutions, particularly those responsible for teacher education. These initiatives have come mainly from local teachers and teacher educators who saw the need to incorporate more culturally meaningful content in the curricula of schools and, more recently, those of teacher education. In 1992, the Pacific Association of Teacher Educators (PATE), a regional network, resolved to revise various teacher education curricula with a view to incorporating important elements of Pacific cultures. With the establishment of a UNESCO Chair in Teacher Education and Culture here at USP, it was possible to take PATE’s initiative to another level by a joint research project involving the regional teacher education institutions in an attempt to find out the extent to which college staff incorporated elements of Pacific cultures in their teaching. In addition, the first five in a series of ten Teacher Education Modules were published last year. We hope to publish the rest soon.

Targeting teacher educators was seen as an important part of our effort to include indigenous knowledge and ways of thinking into the curriculum of higher education in our region, the assumption being that it is the teacher who will have to bridge the cultural gaps in students’ learning, through improved contextualisation of curricula and instruction.

As some of you know, I have spent a good part of my professional career actively trying to develop and advocate teaching and learning philosophies and strategies that are meaningful for Pacific students, most of whom are very much influenced by various cultures, including their home cultures. In my professional and creative writing, I have tried to present a more integrated and culturally inclusive view of teaching and scholarship, drawing from indigenous worldviews and, where possible, incorporating elements of Pacific epistemologies and cultures into my own writing, teaching, and advocacy, and encouraging future teachers to do the same.
The balance of this presentation is my attempt to move forward and offer a suggestion for a refocusing of formal education in our region. The purpose of education in Pacific societies has always been cultural survival and continuity. I suggest that we need to reclaim this purpose today. I see the role of formal education to be the provision of appropriate and relevant learning experiences that help students achieve learning outcomes that will allow them to live in societies that are changing and to contribute positively towards creating sustainable futures. There ought to be a shift of focus in our schools away from an emphasis on academic subjects and towards one based on appropriate student behaviour and performance. I make these suggestions based on my experiences in the areas of curriculum development, teacher education, indigenous education, and women in education, spanning some 30 years, as well as various recommendations by international agencies, the most important being the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission of Education for the Twenty-first Century, otherwise known as the Delors Report.

If we agree that the purpose of formal education in PINs should be (cultural) survival and sustainability, and not the teaching of subject-based disciplines (because we have had them for over a hundred years), then we need to identify the types of student behaviour and performance that we would like to see school-leavers display as a result of their school education. These might form the goals of what has come to be known as “basic education”. The definition of basic education, as well as its goals, is the responsibility of each country and not of international or donor agencies. Focussing on student outcomes rather than (subject) curriculum objectives would encourage each country to ask the following questions:

- Do we have a clear focus on what we expect of our children who go to school?
- Are we willing, through our educational bureaucracies, to provide expanded opportunities for our children to be successful in school?
- What can we say about the system of expectations we have for school-leavers in our country?
- Are we designing our various subject curricula from clearly established outcomes or are we simply producing
curriculum materials, buying textbooks and perpetuating a school curriculum that has been in existence for over 100 years? (Spady, 1993)

Until now, the starting point of our formal education system has been the subject curricula — not the students and what they are supposed to be able to know, do, and be when they leave school. This is evidenced by the fact that almost all examinations that we, as well as our students, have taken focus on the ability to master the knowledge and skills of the various disciplines. An outcome-based education, on the other hand, would aim at assessing the degree to which students have achieved learning outcomes, which might include knowledge of subject matter but will also include other outcomes, ones that go beyond any particular subject or the school itself.

The educational bureaucrats, especially curriculum planners, subject specialists, assessment personnel and teachers, will need to justify what they are planning, teaching, and/or assessing in the light of identified learning outcomes. The formal education system as a whole will be seen as a tool for achieving these important outcomes rather than as an end in itself. If we find that students are leaving school without these capabilities, then the system is at fault, not necessarily the learners.

The underlying philosophy of this outcome-based education is derived from Pacific indigenous education systems, where the purpose of worthwhile learning was cultural survival and continuity and learning was assessed as a matter of behaviour and performance. If we adopt this philosophy, we will have to assume that all students can and should learn as a result of their schooling; and the school system should be willing to say publicly what these important learning outcomes are and be held accountable for them. Assessment will have to shift focus to what students have learnt rather than what the education system and the school have provided, and what teachers have taught.

Students’ learning outcomes would necessarily relate to anticipated adult roles, both within and without national and geographic boundaries. Formulating good outcomes is not an easy task but there exist sources we can go to for help. The following are necessary features of a well-
formulated outcome and we can always add to the list, based upon the educational vision of a particular society (Jasa and Enger, 1994). An outcome:

- provides a picture of student behaviour that will result from learning
- describes long-term learning
- reflects discipline standards beyond the school setting
- acknowledges differing learning styles and types of intelligence
- is understandable to students, parents, and communities
- is appropriate developmentally
- is culturally appropriate
- is gender sensitive
- addresses higher order thinking skills, and
- is assessable, directly or indirectly.

You may see this emphasis on learning outcomes as a return to Tyler’s early work on educational objectives, which unfortunately was overtaken by the behavioural objective movement. Over the years, many curriculum planners and writers have narrowly interpreted Tyler’s work, focussing on textbook and subject content outlines rather than desired changes in the learner (King and Evans, 1991, p. 73).

Identifying and formulating students’ learning outcomes constitutes a major task that will require wide consultation among educators, schools, and communities. I have tried to list some examples of exit outcomes for Tongan students, based on my knowledge and experience of that country. The list may be used as a starting point for a discussion about student outcomes in that country.

- Have the ability to communicate in at least two languages — Tongan and English (in reading, writing, speaking, listening)
- Have basic numerical and computing skills
- Understand and show facility in appropriate Tongan behaviour and etiquette
- Be able to maintain good interpersonal skills
- Demonstrate respect for persons of rank and in positions of authority
- Be able to work cooperatively with others for the purpose
of achieving collective goals

• Demonstrate analytical abilities
• Have problem-solving skills
• Have skill in making value judgements and decisions
• Have skill in creative expression and in responding to the creative work of others
• Have civic responsibility and respect for the law
• Participate responsibly in national, regional, and global environmental conservation initiatives
• Have skill in developing and maintaining good health
• Have skill in using new communication and information technology as a tool for learning and living
• Have skill in life and work planning
• Have skill in appropriate arts and crafts
• Have skill in planting food crops

As well as our own analysis of Pacific societies and cultures, we may also wish to draw upon the recommendations of the International Commission on Education, commonly referred to as the Delors Report (1996). Four Pillars of Learning are identified as possible organising frameworks for education in the 21st century. No doubt many of you here are familiar with these pillars, so I’ll just mention each very briefly. The first is Learning to Know in the context of rapid scientific and technological change and new forms of social and economic activities. The second is Learning to Do — so as to acquire competencies that will enable people to deal with a variety of situations, often unforeseeable, and to be able to work together in teams; pupils need to try out their skills in this area even while they are still in school. The third pillar is Learning to Live Together — the ability to understand others and their history, traditions and spiritual values and the creation of a new spirit that will help people implement common projects and manage conflicts. Finally, there is Learning to Be, in order to achieve greater independence and good judgement; to develop pupils’ untapped talents such as memory, reasoning power, imagination, aesthetic sense, and the ability to communicate effectively with others and the ability to access, select, arrange, manage, and use data.

It is possible that outcome-based learning will lead to a range of different
types of schools and the possibility of new types of educational providers and institutions. Education officials, as well as school personnel, will need to work together with communities in order to develop a common and improved understanding of desired student outcomes. The role of teachers will be to make sure that teaching and learning accomplish these outcomes, and make the necessary adjustments in order to facilitate their achievement.

To summarise, agreed-on student behaviour and performance described in terms of learning outcomes in the context of life in a particular Pacific country should form the foundation upon which to base decisions about school curricula, teaching, assessment, and professional development, NOT a collection of policies and regulations about how schools should be organised or function, or a collection of academic subjects that are taught at university. A shared understanding for all levels of education, including higher education, will be required if this approach is to work for PINs. If we do a good job in identifying learning outcomes, everything will follow from there. Wide consultation among stakeholders will be required, so that a common understanding of what schools are supposed to do can be achieved. Each country’s capacity to support such a refocus will need enhancing, and methods of assessing these outcomes will have to be worked out. There are different models that can be examined for their relevance and appropriateness. One of the attractions of outcome-based education for me is the possibility that it would create more success for more learners, because the outcomes would be diverse and would better reflect the multiplicity of students’ cultures and capabilities, something that our current school system has not been able to do.

In concluding, I want to acknowledge the strong influence of economics on our understanding of the relationship between education and development but, as I have tried to argue here, Pacific educators also need to understand the interaction between education and culture and between economy and culture. We know that formal education reproduces a variety of Western, mainstream cultures and sub-cultures globally; these are important influences in the educational process. They include classroom culture, donor and host cultures, and of course academic culture. The way we will be talking about education in the
next three days will also be influenced by our various cultural and educational experiences. However, I believe that the visions we will encounter will reflect the richness, diversity, flexibility, and inclusivity of our various home cultures, and I believe, too, that we will be able to provide some useful alternatives to the totalising and reductionist thinking which continues to dominate our formal education systems, and which, in my view, significantly contributes to our inability to provide and/or facilitate worthwhile learning experiences for more Pacific people today.

References

CHAPTER 3

Issues and Challenges: A Personal Statement

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We are witnessing astronomical changes, both expected and unexpected, affecting family structures and values, technology, fashion, personal needs, and national and international relations and aspirations. Education is no different — and education must also respond to all the demands and consequences of the fast-changing world and the increasing popularity of globalisation.

This paper is in three parts. The first part re-examines some of the more obvious, yet sometimes ignored, everyday issues that affect education. The second part attempts to explain why values and belief systems are issues in education in the Pacific today. The paper concludes with a glimpse of the challenges we must meet in addressing education in the 21st century.

Issues in education

The following issues are not totally new, but they exist nonetheless. We need to be constantly reminded of their presence and their impacts, particularly on the education of our Pacific children.

Teacher preparation and professional and leadership development

The sub-standard performance of many new teachers in recent years is a clear indication of the urgent need to improve the quality of teacher training and teacher preparation at all levels. A high proportion of teachers come out of teacher training institutions ill-equipped professionally. During pre-service preparation, attention should be given to attitude, commitment, morals, work ethic, and professional development. Teachers are supposed to be caring, committed, and loving human beings to nurture the minds of our youngsters. They need to be able
to transform and translate complex concepts into language that can be understood by all students. They should have a profound grasp of their subject in order to detect gaps in students’ skills and knowledge and develop appropriate learning strategies that effectively address these deficiencies. Teachers should also be sources of inspiration to stretch the students to reach the heights of their potential.

There is also a need to constantly appraise teacher educators, as many of the shortfalls of teacher trainees and newly registered teachers can be traced back to the quality and suitability of teacher trainers and teacher educators.

Most school principals and school administrators in Pacific schools are former teachers who worked their way up the school ladder, but had no training at all in school management and administration. They have virtually no experience in running a school, and often rely on the advice of teachers who also have no management training. The results are chaos, poor management and planning, poor public relations, inability to handle crises and solve internal conflicts, disorganised school programmes, and confused staff and students. There is a lack of vision and specific goals for the school, and there is great confusion about the roles the school could and should play in the development of human resources, the desired knowledge, and the skills and values students should internalise. In many cases bureaucracy takes advantage of the leader’s inexperience.

**Economic and societal factors**

The high number of school leavers and the tough competition for limited job markets mean that demands for higher education and higher qualifications increase. In many island states, the private sector is too weak and inadequate to absorb school leavers, apprentices, and trainees.

The perception that the higher the level of education, the more prestigious and lucrative the opportunities are for their children is so popular among parents that they tend to ignore the limitations of their children’s ability and become oblivious to other more practical and more suitable educational opportunities. This is a challenge for us, to
reform parents’ expectations.

Society at times expects too much from education and schools, and the education system is often blamed for social problems — either we are not doing enough (hence students do not learn, fail, run away, acquire bad habits, etc.), or we are doing too much (students learn too much, resulting in questioning values, talking back to parents, being too liberal minded, etc.). Parents and society as a whole expect schools and the education system to be responsible for everything, from cognitive/intellectual development to moral guidance, to spiritual and social development, and even health and physical care.

**Globalisation**

Globalisation shapes international relations and interactions to such an extent that national and individual identities are in danger of being replaced by borderless corporatisations and movements of capital, economy, technology, and people. This creates new identities that challenge the relationship between ethnicity and nationality. The struggles of indigenous peoples for their heritage and values are in fierce competition with the drive to perpetuate colonial legacies which continue to inform our policy formation and practices. We are thus challenged to provide authentic and appropriate education for Pacific nations in this new millennium by re-examining the questions of: Where we have come from? Where are we now? and: What direction do we take in the future?

To address these challenges, we need to focus on our leadership styles and approaches, work closer together, and learn from each other.

**Management and structure of systems and schools**

The present structures and organisations allow very few opportunities for creative manoeuvrings. Equity of access, quality, and efficiency are bogged down by red-tape, bureaucracy, backwardness, and narrow mindedness. The rigid structure inherited from colonial masters misaligns painfully with the quantum leaps in lifestyle, modern educational demands, communication technology, etc., that are fast becoming
facts of life in most Pacific nations. The highly centralised curriculum implies homogeneity among learners divided socio-economically and geographically. There is a need for a more flexible system that is responsive to the needs of modern-day young people. We are witnessing today wrong priorities, wrong balance in curriculum, inappropriate/inadequate assessment systems, and ineffective learning and training programmes for students and teachers alike. The ramifications of these are: inadequate and poor teacher preparation programmes; uncertainty about the relevance of curriculum and priority areas; access and equity issues giving rise to stratification and strict selection; questionable assessment policies and procedures; and slow or stagnant progress due to lack of research, absence of innovation, and resistance to change.

The pencil tip structure of our school systems allows only a few to reach the highest level of education. It encourages school stratification where the haves go to elite schools and the have-nots go to poorly resourced schools. Geographical barriers and poor communications deny many people access to quality educational resources and services. Equity of access and participation are sorely compromised.

**Socio-cultural barriers and values**

Stereotypical beliefs that girls follow girls’ subjects and career paths, and not technical or scientific pathways, complement socio-cultural gender role perceptions. This is reflected in the small number of females studying science, mathematics, technical, and vocational subjects. We need to change our views because girls can and do perform and must be given access.

Pacific cultures and lifestyles are centred in matters to do with morals and values. Unfortunately, they are not adequately addressed in the curriculum. Matters to do with moral and ethical responsibilities may have direct impact on issues of independence, lifelong learning, and good and responsible self-governance. These may, in turn, have significant effects in offsetting the increasing statistics on juvenile crimes, drug and alcohol abuse, and other modern social ailments.
Why are values and belief systems issues included in formal education today?

There are concerns that our schools and education systems are not paying enough attention to our cultural values and belief systems. It is felt that education now is concerned more with Western values through academic courses and programmes, and that those programmes ignore traditional values. This is evident in today’s youth and students. The restrictive effects of culture are not there to counter the onslaught of society’s modern ailments – drugs, liberal sex and promiscuity, robbery, disrespect to parents and elders, etcetera. The question then is: What seems to be the problem?

Values and beliefs are learned and acquired through example, experience, and what people do, rather than through artificial processes. If children grow up in a home environment where traditional values and beliefs are part and parcel of the “family package”, and experience the feeling of being part of a rich and powerful culture, they will grow up to love and respect the culture and abide by its rules. We witness today signs of the disintegration of family values, It comes in the form of family feuds, where brothers fight legal battles over land ownership and siblings squabble over the family estate. The extended family responsibilities and kavenga used to form an integral part our family commitments. This is no longer the case as people are adopting an individualistic mode of existence controlled by the market economy. The wave of “rights” movements contribute extensively to the demise of family values. Young people are claiming their rights to everything, disputing the group’s norms and traditional chain of command and behaviour patterns. The feeling that “we owe it to the group” is no longer there. The common attitude now is “I don’t care what they say. I have a right to do what I want to do.”

We talk a lot about the beauty of our unique way of life, but how are we going to explain this to our children while at the same time we adopt more and more of the Western lifestyle? If traditional values, beliefs, and ways of life are that important to us, why leave our beautiful little island in Ha‘apai and move to live in a swamp at the edge of Nuku‘alofa? Or why migrate to New Zealand, Australia, or even Fiji in search of a
better life? In what way is our way of life in the islands “less better”? What is wrong with our unique way of life that we are supposed to be proud of? If we can answer these questions truthfully, and make the answers as meaningful as possible to our children, maybe we will be able to see a way forward.

The issue of language in education is also a cause of confusion. How can we teach students to be proud of our Pacific languages while making English the language of everything? Bearing in mind that language is the vehicle through which children create their views of the world, can they create our world views (values, belief systems, culture, etc.) through the lens of someone else’s language? This is going to be difficult because someone else’s language cannot fully express our thoughts and feelings. Our values and principles are best discussed, learned, and taught in our own language.

We only have ourselves to blame for elevating the English language to such a high status. It is a fact that some people believe that the vernacular is not important, and they denigrate it to the extent that they forbid their children from even speaking it. They are proud of not knowing the vernacular language. We need to re-educate these people and repatriate their feelings and attitudes towards indigenous languages and culture as a whole.

It is a fact that children learn from their elders and whatever the elders do is seen by children as accepted behaviour. In this sense, the behaviour and actions of many teachers set poor examples for students. How can teachers teach children to work hard, be honest, be good citizens and free from crimes etcetera, if the teachers openly dodge class, neglect their responsibilities, disappear to town in the middle of the day, get drunk on school compounds, and appear in court for harassing people in night clubs? These are only a few examples of the actions of the “models” to whom we entrust the care and guidance of our children.

To overcome the problems and address the issues facing education in the Pacific today, we must face the challenges in order to reach solutions. Some of these may not be easy and may take a long time, but they must be acknowledged and scrutinised.
The challenges

All Pacific Island state education systems and society at large should attempt to answer these challenges if education is to be improved in the 21st century.

• How to maintain a balance between global and local values in a context that is increasingly borderless, democraticised, corporatized, and globalised? The question of maintaining one’s identity in place of such diversity emerges from this.

• How to change ingrained habits and attitudes of key players in education, such as those of parents, policy makers, teachers, educators, and students, so that awareness of their roles can lead to more realistic expectations? This means redefining the different roles each plays and what is expected of them — personally, morally, and professionally.

• How to draw parents, employment sectors and other key players into a collaborative network —how to set up public-private partnerships in education?

• How to design a relevant education policy that is less linear, more holistic, with set priorities, and the ability to perform the multiple roles of regulating, evaluating, and monitoring all aspects of education in order to maintain quality and equity?

• How to keep the momentum of development without cost to growth and equity issues? In other words, we need to be alert that we do not plan development measures that will benefit only the mainstream at the expense of those in remote/outer, rural, or socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

• How to make the process sustainable in all aspects?

• How to strike and maintain a balance between the development of the individual during education and the well-being of the society so that the social harmony and communality that characterise Pacific society do not come into conflict?
CHAPTER 4

Computer Tigers and Coconut Trees

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Introduction

Robert Redfield, an eminent professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, wrote:

The classroom is important only as it is understood in its relation to the society and culture of the children who occupy it, and teaching will be effective, only as it is related to society and culture. (Redfield, 1973, pp. 201-210)

Unless and until the relationship between education and the human community are systematically examined, a lot that we as educators do today will be dissipated in the uncertainties regarding exactly what kind of society we are educating the young in the Pacific for.

Globalisation: Of Computer Tigers and Coconut Trees

I have used the metaphor of the computer tigers here to denote the onslaught of dangerous yet desirable animals; economic and technological advancements that are commonly associated with globalisation. Iqbal (1999) writes that economics provides the incentive for globalisation, that competition and production, trade, and finance are necessities. Furthermore, he quips, technological advancement is what enables globalisation, as it allows business to be done anywhere in the world, far from owners and managers. He further explains that international relations are today defined by global business relations and interests. Globalisation is, according to him, the organising principle in the world today. Chand (2001), on the same note, says that globalisation has transformed the economies of the developed world but in the process has created many structural changes in developing
countries like Fiji. This process, he says, permeates government policy actions. Governments, he adds, drive these economic structural changes. Siwatibau (2001) succinctly sums this up when he says, “technology drives globalisation”.

The metaphor of the coconut tree, a life-giving tree used for all its parts in the Pacific, denotes everything that gives Pacific Islanders their roots, their anchors, and identifies and locates us in the world. What belongs to us, our cultures, values, our worldviews, knowledge systems are, in my view, antithetical to globalisation but this should not necessarily be so. There is the need to safeguard community knowledge, values etcetera. that are rooted in our cultures so that globalisation does not come into the Pacific to fill vacuums. The two forces (the internal and external) must be both scrutinised, and their strengths harnessed to benefit Pacific people.

**The Pacific today: Internal considerations**

*Smallness and ‘islandness’*

All Pacific Island countries are small and are islands. These two features of smallness and ‘islandness’ have major effects, not only on the physical aspects of the countries, but also on their human and economic conditions. These are features we cannot change. All islands, surrounded as they are by an expanse of water, are isolated. Isolation makes access difficult and this, in turn, affects the plant and animal populations, the type and nature of human settlements developed, and other social and economic conditions. Isolation and insularity create particular educational problems in the Pacific. Transport and communication costs associated with the scattered nature of our islands exacerbate education costs in all Pacific countries.

The issue of size, especially as it relates to cost per unit output, is also an important factor in educational development in all Pacific countries. Small states have a limited resource base, a small private sector that cannot employ all products of the education system. This is not made any easier because of the fact that prices of exports and imports are externally determined. Furthermore, remoteness makes trading links
tenuous and expensive, limiting the affordability of school visits by Ministry officials.

The reality of the post-colonial “small” state

Educators in the Pacific today need to keep examining how our Pacific countries are governed, as this affects in a big way how all sectors of the economy of a country function. As of late, the issue of good governance has gained momentum because of the current political turmoil in Solomon Islands and the post-coup effects in Fiji. Papua New Guinea has also just witnessed riots and killings associated with people’s reactions against government policies of structural adjustment (a policy guideline of the IMB/World Bank).

As Pacific States today continue to evolve from pre-modern absolutist states to the modern democratic versions, certain common features may be seen in all of them. Baba and Coxon (1997) allude to the fact that states have continued with the “old” while trying to grasp the “new”. They observe that Pacific States:

- are keen to keep traditional as well as taken-on aspects of modern constitutional structures – for example, in Samoa only matai (chiefs) can stand for parliament
- do not have a clear state and society separation because everyone knows everyone else. This can make neutrality and impartial decision-making by those in official positions hard
- have adopted a heritage of colonial exploitation and divisions. There are cultural and ethnic divisions in the populations
- have large public sectors and limited resource bases, and
- practise patronage politics. Such politics are divisive, they do not benefit all citizens as they advance personal and group interests only.

These five features are, in my view, what Pacific states have to deal with today internally besides their islandness and smallness. In education, the implications of the reality of the post-colonial state are that education has to address complex issues arising from maintaining the traditional
and adopting the modern. This may mean including issues of good
governance in the school curriculum as well as political education in
general for all citizens.

The Pacific today: External considerations

Education and the waning of the familiar

The familiar comforts of what is Pacific, what is ‘ours”, are, in my view,
waning. Essentially, the indigenous education we gave our children in
our societies prepared them to live in the community. Hau’ofa (1987) in
his work “The Future of Our Past” outlines the waning of the desirable
values such as maintenance of good interpersonal relations in the
Pacific. The indigenous concepts of wisdom as espoused by eminent
Pacific educator and writer Thaman (1997), and others such as Teaero
(1998) and Nabobo (1994) reflect what their indigenous Pacific groups,
namely Tonga, Kiribati and Fiji respectively, consider to be epitomes
of education. Pacific societies had their strengths but they had their
weaknesses, too. However, the expanding gap between the rich and the
poor is, in my view, a by-product of our Western alignment in terms of
our emulation of Western development paradigms. The question perhaps
to ask is: “What society(ies) do we want to prepare our children for?”
If it is a society that reflects “watered-down” versions of the capitalist
West, then I guess we can continue with Western schooling. If we
want a society that reflects human dignity, some sovereignty, and some
equity, then we need to interrogate not only the tenets of educational
thought but those of the development paradigms as well. To do this is to
question values, assumptions, and benefits that underpin these.

The external factors of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and today of
globalisation have removed the absolute control the indigenous people
once held over all aspects of their life. The same is true of states; they
exist much like powerless pawns in a game they are not in control
of. They are reduced to implementers of policies made elsewhere.
Education, like other sectors of government, is affected in this process.
Globalisation: A definition

Baba (1999) notes that globalisation has increasingly transformed the socio-economic landscape in the Pacific since the late 1980s. McGrew (1992, pp. 63-65) defines globalisation as:

simply the intensification of global inter-connectiveness (which) is transforming the existing world order most conspicuously through its direct challenge to the primacy of nation states. In its present form, it defines a process through which events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe.

Baba (1999) further notes that in the mid-1980s with Australia and New Zealand embracing globalisation, they inevitably altered training aid policies in Pacific countries. Such changes, according to him, were in line with the neo-liberal ideology of economic rationalism. Baba (1987) and (1989) are two earlier works which highlight such shifts in the nature of aid funding of the two countries.

Global Forces and Education

As we begin a new millenium, most educators operate with increasing awareness that education, like every other sector in a country’s economy, has to deal with global forces. The Pacific States, given their relatively fragile and limited economic bases, find themselves in situations where they are overly dependent on and controlled by donors and donor-driven agendas in education. This externally driven scenario also has to contend with certain issues, some new, some emergent. Some of these issues, as Mundy (1998) explains, are arising emphasis on technology and information, the increasingly popular discourse on the importance of preparing children for a competitive international information economy, and an increasingly diverse, border-crossing population of learners. This, according to Mundy, has not been accompanied by formal cross-national cooperation, such as that which existed before and after World War I and immediately after World War II.
Globalisation has brought about a shift in the aid policies of both multilateral and bilateral donor agencies. Less emphasis is now given to humanitarian and strategic motives. The redistributive justice idea behind aid in the 1970s has given way to aid driven by the economic motives of aid donors. Neo-Marxists may explain donor agendas of education development policies and practices, especially the agendas of multilateral organisations, as a form of Western neo-imperialism. Mundy (1998) has noted that, after 1980, the move towards a neo-liberal world order came about, in which many third world countries have found themselves with declining raw materials and increasing international debt.

Given globalisation, the Pacific States on the periphery are inevitably integrated into the global economy. The “carriers” of this New World Order (NWO), the World Bank and IMF, see this integration largely as the only valid development direction. Mundy (1998) says that these institutions have, post-World War II, helped to incorporate developing nations into the Western society of states, using modernisation as a model for development.

While there may be different approaches taken in the Pacific to introduce structural adjustment policies in education, some general features can be observed. Of these features Baba (1999, pp. 35-36) highlights:

- reduction of education budgets and setting up of cost-sharing arrangements
- greater emphasis on basic education and literacy skills
- greater stress on quality of outcome through efficiency and productivity measures
- greater emphases on development of scientific, agro-technical skills for economic development
- reduction in growth and funding of tertiary education
- increasing use of foreign aid to fund projects in line with donors’ interests, and
- greater reliance on community to fund schools and the promotion of self-employment through community education projects.
To these I would add:

- reduction in the size of public services sectors (reduced size of education bureaucracies)
- greater emphasis on economic rationality and efficiency in all policies in education.

A reduction of education budgets goes hand in hand with the structural adjustment notion of a “user-pays” system. In big economies, this may be rational but, in our Pacific countries, the earning capacity of families to, for example, support University tuition costs of $3,000 per year, is minimal, given that the income per capita of most countries is below $2,000 per year (Baba, 1999, p. 37).

On a similar note, Subramani (Learning Together, 2000, p. 2) emphasises the importance of the Ministry of Education getting substantial increases in its overall budget as it meets new post-coup demands of promoting social harmony amongst the people of Fiji. However, he notes that cuts have already begun in relation, for instance, to per capita grants (ibid.). Such cuts relate to the idea of a user-pays system, and also concurs with reductions in budgets in the social services sector; for example, of education and health.

This is confirmed by Graham-Brown (1991, p. 36) when she highlights “the culture of cuts” which began in the 1980s in most developing countries where states for one reason or another reduced expenditure in education and other social sectors. She emphasises that budgets need to increase to meet increased demands and inflation.

Basic education and literacy skills are greatly emphasised in the Pacific. This is the result of the declaration issued by the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. This UN sponsored conference envisaged the achieving of primary education for all by 2000.

The World Declaration asserts that:

To serve the basic learning needs of all requires more than a recommitment to basic education as it now exists. What
is needed is an “expanded vision” that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula and conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices. (World Declaration on Education for All, 1990, Article 2)

Likewise, “Education Fiji 2020” (2000, p. 3) echoes the World Declaration item, concurring with its idea of building on the best in current practices:

It [2020] seeks to build upon the existing strengths of our education system and poses some significant challenges. In meeting these we will all have to be responsive to new needs, flexible when addressing problems and excellent in all that we do.

The justification of the focus on basic education and literacy for all, and away from higher education, is that basic education serves a larger section of the population compared to the fewer elite served by tertiary education. Meyer and Hannan (1979) as well as Psacharopoulos (1987) affirm this, saying that the rates of return for primary level education are the highest. Graham-Brown (1991), however, stresses that the emphasis on basic education must not eclipse the need to develop and finance higher education. Developing countries, she notes, must have their own pool of qualified and highly skilled people and intellectuals to critically analyse their history, economy, and society. Baba (1999) voices the same concern when he mentions that others have interpreted the UN focus on basic education as a means of maintaining a docile work force, a cheaper alternative than a well-qualified work force, and thus more attractive to foreign industries.

The University of the South Pacific, through its Institute of Education (IOE), is also influential in the Pacific region in the promotion of Basic Education and Literacy. Baba (1999) notes that one of the aspects of the current UNDP-UNESCO-AusAID-UNICEF Basic Education and Life Skills Project (BELS) focuses on literacy and numeracy testing at primary school level in Pacific schools. This, he claims, is part of the new orthodoxy of globalisation in education in the Pacific.
Whatever direction the debate goes, basic education continues to feature in education documents and policies in the Pacific region. In “Education Fiji 2020” (2000, p. 3), for instance, it is noted:

Significant financial resources of government were directed towards the improvement of access to education for all citizens of Fiji through increasing contributions to the basic education costs for students at both primary and secondary level and a substantial increase in the number of schools to ensure basic educational coverage for all.

This is constantly emphasised throughout the Fiji Education Commission/Panel Report (Learning Together, 2000). Likewise in Kiribati, Chandy (1999, p. 6) notes that only 55% of primary school-leavers continue in secondary education. He adds:

With the global concern for universal free and compulsory Basic Education, it is high time we educators, citizens and policy makers and those other partners and participants in the education of these children, consider Education as a human right.

Education is also seen as a central vehicle to economic globalisation as a supplier of human capital, a kind of neo-modernisation approach. Together with this is the emphasis on efficiency, quality, and a tendency to use an input-output approach. Productivity, like quality, are words that dominate education planning documents and policy today in the Pacific. “Education Fiji 2020” (2000, p. 1) also emphasises the importance of education as supplier of human capital, saying:

It [2020] is a blue print to promote the very best education for our students and to help create a more forward looking and productive society. Our young people are our most valuable resource and it is they who provide the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable future for us all.

With globalisation comes the emphasis on efficiency, productivity, and outcomes. The Kiribati Public Services Commission has as one
of its outcomes: “an efficient and right sized public service, increased accountability for results within the service” (Government of Kiribati, 1999, p. 10).

Likewise, Education Fiji 2020 (2000, p.1) was intended to be a blueprint to help create a more efficient service and productive society. Furthermore, the same document notes that outcomes described in the document are reference points from which to measure success.

Another feature associated with efficiency has been the down-sizing of the public sector. The 1999 Kiribati Budget (Kiribati, p. 10) highlighted the goal of right-sizing the public sector. The Fiji Education Commission/Panel Report (Learning Together, 2000, p. 60) notes:

> Government has been under pressure to reduce the size of the public sector as part of a reform strategy aimed at achieving a balanced budget. This approach is linked to structural adjustment policies advocated by international financial institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank.

This means a reduction in the size of education bureaucracies. In our small island states what this means is a reduction in numbers of education officers. On the one hand this may mean saving much needed money; on the other, it means a further reduction in the already very rare visits remote schools get from officers. This is going to affect a lot of schools, especially as the Fiji 1996 Census data indicates that over half of young people between 5 and 19 years of age live in rural areas. For primary schools 38% are in rural areas; of these 38% are in very remote areas. With secondary schools, 51.9% are in rural areas, of which 23.7% are in very remote areas (Learning Together, 2000:162).

There is also the apparent feature of the devolution of state responsibilities in education funding to the community (Baba, 1999; and Pareti, 1998). The likely result of this is that schools run by richer communities will benefit while those run by poorer communities will fall further behind. This will impact on quality. Bacchus (Learning Together, 2000, p. 56) on a similar note states that “Economic circumstances in many rural
communities limit their capacity to adequately fund and maintain school facilities and resources”.

The Fiji Education Commission/Panel Report (Learning Together, 2000, p. 4) highlights the same:

A major feature of the education system in Fiji is community ownership and management of schools. Often in the face of economic hardship and adversity communities raise and devote significant human, physical and financial resources to the education of young people.

There are also urban schools in Fiji that are poor, and devolution of financial responsibilities by government would also be detrimental to them. Building and maintenance costs are high in the Pacific as in other Third World countries and these cannot be met adequately by our communities. In many Pacific schools, whether rural or urban, textbooks, exercise books, blackboards, chalk, desk, chairs, pencils — all ordinary objects we identify with a classroom — are scarce or non-existent. Recurrent costs add to the burden of educational financing. Under pressure from the IMF, Pacific governments will perhaps freeze salaries, de-regulate goods, introduce new taxes (e.g. VAT), and so forth. These actions will inevitably impact on education — its provision, equity, and quality – and access to it.

A heavy reliance on foreign aid for education funding seems the way to go in most Pacific countries. Coxon and Nabobo (2000) note that in Solomon Islands, local perceptions of aid are tainted with cynicism as projects which are donor-driven fail to be sustainable, are inappropriate and do not take on board local views, especially in the early planning stages.

This aid dependency is worsened when organisations such as the World Bank advise the charging of user-fees and “cost-recovery” mechanisms to cut or level off government expenditure on education. This has implications on equity, especially with different potentials of parents to afford everything that means and is associated with schooling, as
mentioned earlier. Economic situations, compounded by political events and associated instabilities, especially of Solomon Islands and Fiji, exacerbate the equity issue, as political events have led to significant losses of income, especially for the poor or under-privileged.

We also perhaps need to totally abandon the myth that education is a miraculous solution to all social and economic ills, as was envisaged and promoted by the modernisation theorists, whose views are strengthened even more by neo-modernisation, especially with the New World Order (NWO) as manifested by the insidious arms of globalisation. After abandoning this myth, we need to locate education within the economic and social structure of society; education is not independent of these.

The economic structure of society is increasingly today dictated to by the WTO and IMF. Formal education serves today as an instrument of modernisation as it was in the development decade. Today, it is a major avenue of concern because of the so called “debt-crisis” some Pacific countries are faced with. Once the debtor-nation is no longer able to keep up payments, except by further borrowing on disadvantageous terms (that is, short term, high interest credits), it is the creditor nations and institutions in the North which inevitably call the shots (Graham-Brown, 1991, p. 16). Debtor nations’ inability to pay off loans makes it difficult for them to borrow from government, commercial banks, or multi-lateral agencies. Debtor nations seek help from IMF, and find themselves in a situation where the IMF negotiates and prescribes rescheduling arrangements on the condition that certain economic “stabilization” measures are taken. When nations reject such measures or frameworks, they are denied further loans and assistance.

Pacific countries have become debt-ridden and dependent in their effort to develop. We have then to ask the question: where are we going from here?

**Possibilities**

Education in the Pacific needs to deal with internal as well external factors. Given the fact that we cannot alter our “smallness” and “islandness”, we must, as the former President of Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, said,
find ways to overcome such constraints related to our smallness of scale. Punnett (1999) has suggested that such smallness of scale needs effective management while Bacchus (2000, p. 62) notes the need for proper and appropriate utilisation of resources plus creative economic policies.

On the factor of the power of the post-colonial Pacific state, I am of the view that while states evolve, it is crucial that people receive education on good citizenship and are prepared to accept changes in the nature of states as they inevitably will evolve from pre-modern absolutist states to democratic modern states. Political upheavals of the recent past and ongoing repercussions in Fiji and Solomon Islands point to the need for this type of education.

It is also imperative that we check accepted development paradigms; they have brought about developments on heavy loans that have “colonized” Pacific nations permanently unless such loans are purposefully and deliberately removed by the North. It is also apparent that globalisation promotes and constructs a world culture that is characterised by homogenous national educational policies linked to modern ideals of “nation and citizen”. Thaman, in her keynote address to this colloquium, has talked about Pacific education and how it continues to mirror the reforms and education ideas of metropolitan countries, thereby promoting a homogenous culture. She notes that (foreign) reform consultants were already telling Pacific people that children must also understand the so-called global culture and recent advances in new information technology and the current euphoria about cyberspace and its promises for education of various types and descriptions. Thaman adds that globalisation creates inequality in the Pacific.

Schooling needs to be scrutinised, especially the perception that it is an instrument of development (technical-functional theory of modernisation). We need to examine why and how it benefits our people. We need to ask questions about education. Why are we offering what we are when the majority of our people are falling by the wayside, not reaching tertiary education? What should the schools offer today? And why? We need to check school culture; all Pacific countries should, for
example, have as a compulsory subject an exploration of community knowledge and values — this should be made part of the formal school curriculum. Such exploration will ensure that students know what is “theirs” and perhaps understand or learn to use both this and school knowledge in their lives.

Communities can organise their own initiatives to help the poor to survive as well as to send the children to school. Organised groups of women, religious communities, and other community groups have tried and can continue to create their own types of education, community support, and development initiatives. However, there is not much they can do about the wider economic and political problems at the international and national levels.

People may need non-formal programmes more today to teach them new skills. Should schools get the lion’s share of the education budget, especially when, as Thaman (2001, p. 6) states, fewer than 5% of our people make it to tertiary education? This is a question that needs to be seriously addressed.

**Conclusion: Which way forward for Pacific education?**

Educators may need to establish, promote, and network a lot more in the Third World to find ways and means of offering alternative development paradigms and educational theories to strengthen and affirm our peoples. Pacific educators must not promote the current trend of treating “education as a curative process” — we must be more proactive in all aspects of our work in order to:

- redefine our educational goals (bearing in mind context)
- redefine paradigms of thoughts and explore Pacific worldviews and then take cognisance of these in formal education
- publish and promote alternative thinking on education and on realities (worldviews)
- engage Northern scholars to accept (ideologically) that the debt crisis is of their making and they should, therefore, contribute to the solutions
- debate/engage thinkers more on future directions
• discuss more with our people (outside education) to negotiate, redefine, give us a vision for education for the future
• scrutinise the mixed motives of external educational funding (aid).

Furthermore, Pacific education needs to accommodate:
• the teaching of indigenous and student community values — this means important curriculum policy reforms.
• curriculum directions founded in local, specific, cultural traditions while still providing access to the skills to participate in and contribute to larger modern society (to include local knowledge/values documentation). Important indigenous notions of vanua (whenua), land, as a source and focus of social actions, identity and all social intercourse. This can be part of citizenship education.
• teachers’ examination of differences between the culture of the students and that of the school, as well as modern forces such as globalisation. This way, teachers can understand what elements of the school’s culture are antithetical and incomprehensible to pupils, what are acceptable, and for what personal, social, and economic reasons they are acceptable.

In concluding, the USP, as the pinnacle institution of education in the South Pacific, should establish a School of Indigenous Studies. This can replace or come under the Institute of Pacific Studies and can offer courses in all aspects to Pacific cultures, knowledge, land rights, etcetera. This can be a focal point of “A New Development” paradigm that can focus on our people. It can be proactive in promoting and safeguarding the Pacific nations from the onslaught of the tigers (both old and new) as well as find ways to anchor ourselves in what is beneficial from our roots. The coconut tree must be allowed to live with the computer tiger.
References


CHAPTER 5

The Economy Dictates the School Curriculum

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Educators across the Pacific and, if truth be told, across the world, fondly believe that it is they with their expertise, experience, and knowledge who primarily direct the contents of school curricula. After all, they have trained for this task for years and focused their considerable energies to bring about the best mix of what society understands as essential for young minds to learn, what values it expects to be passed on, and what the world they will live in expects. They, the curriculum experts, weld the sometimes disparate needs – society’s expectations and hopes, and the modern world’s requirements – together to make a workable learning atmosphere. In reality, however, it is the international and national economic juggernaut that dictates not only the fundamentals, but also which way the curriculum must travel.

Formal schooling in Pacific Island countries is not exempt from this basic truth. In spite of the strong and close connection many Pacific students retain through their physical connection with nature, coupled with significant distance from the metropolitan centres, still the basics of schooling in Solomon Islands are not that different from a school in New South Wales or the middle of Denver in the US.

The modern education paradigm was probably the first organised globalisation step currently sweeping the world, east and west, north and south, even before the word was in vogue. To graphically illustrate this truth and make it locally relevant, the idea of a dinghy tied to the mother ship comes to mind. Pacific Island people are no strangers to small ships with their even smaller boats, their dinghies, following behind them everywhere they sail. The dinghy always follows the mother ship and never leads. The dinghy is at the beck and call of the mother ship and never the other way around. I use the ship/dinghy analogy as a way
of linking the close relationship of the Pacific formal education patterns and the subservient role formal education plays to the market economy values that currently dominate all Islander lives.

The modern education system that all Pacific Island children are exposed to is akin to the Trojan horse of old. When the young island child enters her first classroom, she enters a world fundamentally different from her village life. In other words, what she begins to experience from the very first day of formal education is more than a simple leaf classroom, a new teacher, different children, and sometimes even a new language. What she experiences from the very first day of school is a strangely, deeply different way of viewing the world. It is a world that she has scarcely been prepared to interact with. Little in her village life has prepared her to handle a way of life so alien and so different from what she lives in the village.

She is told very soon after entering that this new world does hold out some serious rewards. From the first days of schooling, she is solemnly told to work hard, study well, and at the end of the day she will be rewarded with a job. Paid employment is the entry point to this new world that all her formal education aims at. She has never heard such language used when she undertook her life education patterns in the village.

There, the young girl had been introduced to life’s fundamentals. Village living, the microcosm of what is important, what is vital and what is of less import had been the constant lessons she was taught from her mother’s breast. There she was introduced to the vitally important personal relationships – who are her parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, in-laws, close and distant relatives, etcetera – and, most importantly, what relationship she has to the land, the very resource base vital to her wellbeing for the rest of her life. The unique life patterns of her people, their customs, their special treasures, and their special secrets became the normal lessons learnt daily.

Respect, tolerance, and patience with other people and especially with the surrounding landscape, a value system, were insistently shared by those older, wiser, and more knowing. Environmental thinking, to
use the language of the stranger, was already a normal part of her up-
bringing because she lived in the *nenue* (*vanua, whenua, etc.*) every
day. It was not a lesson learnt but a living lesson of her everyday life.

These life-values are rarely touched upon in school. There, a new world
emerges, one which focuses tightly on things which at the time make
little sense but since it seems every one of her people think this school
life is something good, the child obediently follows what her parents
and elders decree.

What is most startling for our young schoolgirl, however, is that a’
totally different language now dominates her school life. Her mother
tongue, the language in which she first encountered the world, is no
longer spoken. The language she has mastered, the language she uses to
better her understanding of life around her, the language she speaks to
interact with her relatives – this language is, in fact, sometimes ridiculed
and reduced to something unimportant. Talk about confusion!

**Assertions**

The preceding paragraphs feature a number of assertions which I would
like to elaborate on as fundamental to understanding why so much
education financing has been invested with seeming insufficient return
on investment. When we do our “Re-thinking Pacific Education” we
would be well advised to listen to these village voices. Of course, I
speak with a Melanesian accent and some of my assertions could be less
true of other parts of the Pacific.

**People’s basic education realities are vital**

The continuing strength of custom (*kastom* in Pijin) in people’s thinking
and behaviour gives insights into how important villagers perceive
education to be. *Kastom* is not simply about unique ways of cooking,
dressing, and acting. A people’s basic education package focuses
on deep values, important aspects of life, and the very survival of a
people. Rather than understanding *kastom* as a hindrance, it should be
considered as an important buttress to the formal education system.
Market forces dominate Pacific Education

The analogy of the ship/dinghy is a valid way of perceiving the place of our formal education system. Our education patterns reflect the reality and the demands of the marketplace. No amount of tinkering with curricula, teacher training, expert advice, and the setting of national priorities will advance unless it is understood that the marketplace is firmly in the driver’s seat. The question must be how to understand the power of the marketplace and work within it to strengthen the reality of village living.

Take the idea of a school preparing the child for the world of work. This idea currently almost completely dominates the reason for sending children to school. This is how parents, children, and society itself perceive the education enterprise. Children go to school and parents pay fees for their sons and daughters with the fond hope that at the end of their schooling a job is waiting for them. Ask a secondary school student why she goes to school and the answer goes along these lines: “To get a job to pay back my parents for the school fees they paid”.

Early community intervention is vital

A people’s education patterns and the formal education system are not contradictory aspects of a child’s education for life. They must be viewed as a complementary and holistic way of educating our young people. In environmental terms, for instance, it is well accepted that we do our best to learn from the local knowledge base and a community’s know-how before our scientific insights will root well. Both sources of knowledge-reality must be harnessed one to another for success. So, too, when it comes to harnessing both education energies one to another.

Early childhood training is essential

Rather than throwing our youngest into the formal education system with little if any preparation, early childhood training schemes are vital for the continued health of our formal education systems. At present, early childhood training attempts remain the domain of parents, especially mothers, who are particularly attuned to the needs of their small ones.
Many mothers have experienced the formal system for many years and could, if assisted, act as the bridging mechanism for melding the community’s education for life and the formal system’s training for the marketplace.

**All education systems need understanding**

Although Early Childhood Training is a necessary preparation for the rest of schooling, all other levels of formal education must become aware of the power of the marketplace and how it informs the education curriculum for its own needs and ends.

The marketplace is one of the most powerful inventions that humanity has created and it seems it will only become stronger in the globalisation era. Education patterns, like the dinghy that I spoke about at the beginning, are at the beck and call of market forces. Important as they are, they are but one value among a host of others. Village life and village realities, for instance, are not part of this vision as presently constituted.

A major purpose for Solomon Island children going to school should be to educate youth for the good life. The Solomon Islands good life is one that has to do with culture, co-operation, remaining close to nature, and understanding and responding to 21st century life, problem solving – a life of the spirit and education for self-employment. Jobs, working for pay, and formal paid employment will always be part of island life but must not dominate the education system, as they do today.
CHAPTER 6

Beyond Access and Participation: Challenges Facing Pacific Education

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Introduction

The issues that are frequently identified as problems with education in Pacific Island Countries (PICs) often obscure the fundamental goals of education, the nature of education for Pacific communities, and the potential scope of these in the emerging discourse on education for Pacific peoples. Commonly, the problem issues of Pacific education are characterised by a lack of resources, untrained teachers, inadequate funding, poor management, and non-participating parents. In some Pacific communities, this list also includes low levels of literacy, low participation rates, limited access to education, and the like. As issues related to schooling, these matters are important, but they are the results of underlying causes that must be considered and addressed.

In this paper, I examine two underlying challenges facing education in the PICs. These are (a) the mismatch between In-School (IS) and Out-of-School (OS) education, and (b) the modernisation of education. My discussion is limited to a description of these challenges and an assessment of the extent of attention given to them. I conclude with a discussion on the potential for a healthy discourse on Pacific education around these challenges.

Background

Education in the Pacific was introduced to the various island groups by Christian missionaries and, later, by colonial governments. At that time, the idea was to “civilize” and Christianise the Islanders. Later, the purpose of education for many PICs was to give basic writing, reading, and arithmetic skills to a few who were to work in the local colonial
service. Closer to gaining political independence (for the majority of PICs), education was aimed at preparing politicians, teachers, nurses, technicians, and bureaucrats.

On the attainment of political independence, these countries inherited colonial education systems and assumed the responsibility for administering them. Today, all PICs have their own national education systems, managed by government ministries of education. Typically, these systems of education continue to reflect the management models, curricula, and assessment criteria of their colonial pasts. Commonly, teaching and learning strategies, expectations of students, qualifications of teachers, and expectations of parental involvement are all extensions of the ideas of former colonial societies.

Through development aid and globalisation, education in PICS has continued to be impacted and led by former colonial societies. While general levels of schooling have improved and relatively more Islanders have access to educational opportunities, the social realities within certain local contexts remain largely dismal. Consequently, the educational problems referred to in the introduction remain universally common throughout PICs.

In the meantime, the societal expectations of education have not waned. Generally speaking, education in PICs is expected to modernise each of the countries, to train people in needed skills and expertise, and to provide law-abiding and participating citizens. Parents also expect education to ensure the survival and renewal of indigenous Pacific cultures. The sad truth is, however, that education in PICs is not meeting any of these expectations fully.

**The mismatch: IS and OS education**

Throughout PICs, the world of IS and that of OS are seen as distinct entities. The world of IS, for younger children, is the 7-3-5 world. This world begins at 7 am and ends at around 3 pm, 5 days a week. During this time, the majority of Pacific Island children are at school, where their world is one of roll calls, uniforms, books, chalk, computers, sitting in rows, abstract learning, speaking English (or French), and assimilating...
foreign values. In this world, the values and skills deemed desirable to acquire are nationally prescribed in curriculum texts, taught by officially sanctioned specialist teachers, and monitored by government officials who are seldom seen at the school or known by the students and parents. Increasingly now, the IS world is also the world of videos, television, computer games, and the internet.

In other words, for Pacific children, the IS world is one of conflicting value systems, of cultural intrusion, of identity denial, of pretensions and of compelling aspirations for things not theirs. The purpose of education in the IS domain is to pass examinations, the ultimate goal being to obtain a good paying job, in the city.

In contrast, the OS world for Pacific children is the world outside the 7-3-5 period. This is the world of the familiar, the realm of parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and wantoks. In this world, life is determined by relationships, by fakatonga (Tonga), fa’a-Samo (Samoa), and by fa/afa/a (Kwara’ae, Solomons). Commonly, the OS world is also the realm of the Church. This is the world of the youth leader who is a cousin, the pastor who is an uncle, and of singing and praying in the local language. In the OS world, youth meetings, string bands, singing bands and the like are not timed in a precise manner but are done and completed when it is appropriate to do so. In this realm, relationships between people, as opposed to the task or the clock, determine how time is spent and how good use of it is measured.

This is the world of non-compartmentalisation, of being always tentative, of frequent doses of grace, of learning and working together, of competing in fun, and of purposive socialisation. For Pacific children, this is the sphere of the familiar where education serves to prepare the children with skills and values that are needed for them to live and participate as members of their local communities.

The response by PICs to this inconsistency between IS education and OS education can be categorised in three ways: primary attention on IS education, primary attention on OS education, and balancing them both.
Primary attention on IS education

Commonly, Pacific Island communities focus their attention on the IS experience. This is reflected in the political, structural bureaucratic and administrative attention given to it. Financially, IS education receives an allocation in the national budget that ranges from 20% in Vanuatu, to 18% in Kiribati to 15% in the Solomon Islands (UNDP, 1999). A multi-level, national system of schools exists in each PIC, often with substantial organisational, financial, and human resource support. In other words, from early childhood through to tertiary level education, Pacific communities dedicate substantial resources to IS education, relative to OS education.

A feature of the IS experience is also the nature and extent of participation by international bilateral donors (such as Australia, Japan, China, New Zealand, Taiwan), multilateral donors (such as The European Union, UNESCO, UNDP), and lenders (The World Bank, Asian Development Bank). While the degree of participation by international stakeholders may vary from one country to another, the nature and the impact of the activities are fundamentally disheartening, due to their demoralising effects.

At the level of the village community, primary attention to IS education is demonstrated in the high status given to the schooled person relative to the unschooled. By virtue of the position one holds in a wage-paying job, a successful graduate of the IS system is often put on a pedestal and becomes an icon of the dreams and aspirations of Pacific Island parents, whether or not these aspirations are realised.

In itself, the attention on IS education is not all irrelevant as it has resulted in increased access to schools, a greater participation in the global economy, and more interactions with the outside world. By and large, however, the attention on IS education has been disappointing. First, such attention is frequently given unreflectively at the cost of OS education, thereby neglecting the latter. The end result is an OS experience that is starved for resources, some needed revitalisation and community care. Second, in spite of the attention, IS education has not performed relative to the community’s investments in it and
expectations from it. Third, over time, the neglect of OS education is beginning to show in the decay in local cultures through the systematic marginalisation of indigenous peoples’ knowledge, history, culture, and values.

**Primary attention on OS education**

While giving primary attention to OS education may not be widespread in PICs, it is still prevalent in pocket communities throughout the region. In some Melanesian communities, it is common for parents covertly or overtly to discourage girls, younger siblings, or the eldest sibling from going to or continuing school on the grounds of kastom, family economy, parental preference, or plain ignorance.

This attention by itself is not necessarily misplaced, as children in PICs can still be adequately educated for their local communities entirely in the OS realm, without going to school. The sad truth, however, is that OS education often suffers from a dearth of parental and community enlightenment, which reveals itself in a lack of care and commitment in planning for it, organising it better, putting needed resources into it and providing leadership for it. Consequently, in Pacific communities where the primary attention is placed on OS education, this sector of socialisation remains the realm of missed opportunities, of blurred visions, of frustrated aspirations, of unfulfilled dreams, and unrealised goals. In a global sense, these communities experience considerable cultural stagnation, self-imposed marginalisation, and are imprisoned in their own communities of mind.

A challenge for communities that may fall into this category is to ensure their own survival. This is because, as a movement, the modernisation agenda rarely takes no for an answer and often forces its own way over communities that are seen to be in the way. The answer for Pacific communities, therefore, may not be in an outright rejection of IS education and its modernisation agenda. Nor is the answer in an assimilationist stance. This is because the destination for both responses is potentially the same – cultural obliteration.
Balancing IS and OS education

The response which is needed in PICS is to ensure that the realm of IS reflects that of OS in a manner which is responsive to the changing needs of the communities. This is to say that philosophically, educationally, and organisationally the IS socialisation experience must reflect and be integrated with that of the OS (Thaman, 1999). The IS curriculum must be embedded in, not foreign to, the OS. Teaching and learning must obtain their theories and practices from the OS. As well, the IS must contribute towards the positive advancement of the OS. The entire relationship must be critically reflective and mutually purposeful in nature.

For this to happen, Pacific Island communities need to examine their education with a view to clarifying and agreeing on a coherent and purposeful socialisation experience for all the members of their communities. One of the aims of education might be to ensure the survival of these communities as cultural groups. There may be a need to clarify the advantages, idiosyncrasies, and conflicts that exist in the nature of education, as well as in a multi-levelled debate on it. A critical challenge is to negotiate this agenda and process developmentally.

Presently, there are few Pacific Island communities that are successfully balancing OS and IS education. For those that are showing promise, the success stories appear to be coming from sectors that are community-focused, such as the non-formal, early childhood, and adult education sectors.

Modernising Pacific education

The challenge of modernisation of Pacific education is discussed under the following headings: (a) the projectisation of education, (b) the creation of national systems, and (c) the mathematisation of education.

Education projects

Education projects have been and remain a key feature of Pacific education. Typically, the project strategy is aimed at meeting clearly
defined objectives, within a specific time frame, with particular inputs, towards certain outcomes and financed largely through foreign donor grants or international loans. The external support for education projects explains why such activities are adequately resourced, attract promising local staff, and enjoy undisturbed progress in spite of cashflow problems at the national treasury. Through the education project strategy, strides have been made throughout PICs in many areas, such as expanding educational services, improving the quality of programmes, and establishing needed policy and administrative support mechanisms.

As an activity or series of activities, education projects generally operate in isolation from the total sectoral development strategy of a country. In some PICs, this may be explained partly by the lack of clear political and professional leadership for education in local contexts. More often, however, this is a result of the manner in which educational aid is negotiated and agreed upon. Where PICs are not well organised, finding donors is like fishing, where certain education projects are dangled in front of donors, who then decide which “bait” to nibble. The particular projects that are “hooked” then become the focus of attention for the education sector, often at the cost of other sectoral areas, however essential these may be. Usually, the education project has it all, all the time. The project office never runs out of A4, has the latest computer software programmes, the only photocopying machine in the neighbourhood, and air-conditioned offices; and its phone/fax lines are never disconnected. It is in this sense that the education project as a strategy in PICs often takes on a life of its own and becomes the centre of educational development, at least for the duration of the project.

Sadly, education projects are short-lived. They rise and fall. Commonly, concerns over issues of quality, support levels and on-going resourcing emerge soon after project completion. The explanations are not simple; contributing factors include inappropriate project designs, lack of ownership of project goals, lack of leadership, and simplistic assumptions about local situations. Emerging commentaries by Pacific educators (Nabobo, 2000; Tahu & Fangalasu’u, 1994) are indicative of the abundance of knowledge and relevant experiences that Pacific Islanders possess about education projects. These experiences need to be shared within the region, and with donors as well, in order to
prevent donors and PICs repeating the same mistakes across sectors or international boundaries.

**National systems**

A common feature of independent PICs is the organisation of political, economic, social, and religious institutions along national lines. There is, in each country, a national education system, a national health system, a national prison service, and national church systems. For PICs with smaller homogenous populations, these national organisations have strengthened the national ethos and have contributed towards a firmer sense of nationalism. In more culturally diverse PICs, these national systems have created a sense of nationhood among peoples of diverse ethnicities.

However, the national systems of education have been both a blessing and a curse, especially in Melanesia. The various national high school systems of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu have helped to bring different ethnic students together in educational institutions such as Aiura national high school (PNG), King George VI national high school (Solomon Islands), or Malapoa College (Vanuatu). The national examination systems and the national selection systems of these countries have ensured that the most academically gifted students, of diverse ethnicities, have been selected to be socialised for leadership roles in these national high schools.

These benefits have not been closely examined for their effectiveness. A critical, though unintended, downside to these national systems is that they are elitist and their benefits, while honourable, are outweighed by their costs. The reality in all three Melanesian countries is that these national systems have helped only a minority of citizens. The majority of students are disadvantaged by these national systems and, two decades after independence, it is becoming clearer that there are pockets of ethnic communities within these countries that have been systematically marginalised. Their participation in these national systems has been either minimal or non-existent. Where they have participated, their success has been meagre, and their participation in the wider societal arena has, therefore, been limited and insignificant. Over a number of
decades, the effects of group marginalisation in Melanesia have been disastrous, as seen in the militancy resorted to by ethnic Guadalcanal youth of Solomons Islands and the indigenous Bouganvillians of Papua New Guinea.

To date, governments and educational institutions of PICs have not systematically examined this inequality of opportunity, access, and outcomes for diverse ethnic communities within their nation states. Particularly in Melanesia, the effectiveness of national systems of education, examination curricula, and selection in response to the need for equality of opportunity for diverse ethnic communities requires careful scrutiny. In addition, the relative weighting of goals and functions of national systems against those for more localised systems requires close study.

Mathematisation of education

Whether it is from global frameworks or national plans education in PICs is often presented in mathematical and statistical terms. The UNESCO Education For All Framework (UNESCO, 2000) has, as one of its six goals, the achievement of 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015. A UNDP (1999) report showed that the adult literacy rate for Samoa was 96%, for Tuvalu it was 95%, for Papua New Guinea it was 28%, and for Solomon Islands it was 30%. Numerous national reports or plans for countries use statistics extensively.

These statistical descriptions of education are useful as precise indicators of educational levels or goals. However, PICS appear to accept these descriptions, especially global ones, uncritically and without regard for the relevance of their interpretations to local contexts. A concern for describing and defining PICs’ education purely in statistical terms arises out of the need to represent local contexts by measures that are likely to capture the cultural and subsistence affluence of local population groups. Moreover, as global measures, these frameworks often appear and disappear as convenient to external stakeholders and, consequently, the frameworks are not around long enough for the negative effects of their usage within local Pacific contexts to be seen.
PICs may need to scrutinise global frameworks descriptors and goals of education to ensure that these adequately reflect local needs. PICs may also wish to explore alternative ways of representing educational standards and measures of quality to complement statistical representations of education in these communities.

**Concluding statement**

The foregoing discussion has focussed on the failure of schooling in the PICs to adequately reflect and embrace Pacific societal cultures. In their endeavours to educate their members, PICs have assumed a strategy of modernisation with little regard to its effects on the greater good: local empowerment, societal equality, and ethnic survival. This has resulted in schools not being reflective of societal realities, particularly those of indigenous communities. The foreign nature of the schooling experience has also meant that within individual PICs, schools may not even adequately reflect the national macroculture. Consequently, the schooling experience appears to be influenced more by global ideas, others’ grounds of knowledge and introduced concepts, thereby neglecting to transmit local cultures to future generations of Pacific children. A consequence of this is the continuing decline of educative experiences for the majority of Pacific peoples within the realities of their local contexts.

The foregoing underlying challenges need to be incorporated in the discourse on Pacific education. As education is a process of ordering and selecting societal values, a scrutiny of the current mismatch in PICS between IS and OS education is necessary. Within individual PICs, debates must take place on the choice of educational purposes for national and local communities. Furthermore, the functions of educational services, the priorities of those functions in relation to societal needs, and the sharing of responsibilities for education require clarification. Issues of learning, teaching, and ways of delivery within various cultures present themselves as ideal grounds for intellectual debate.

A careful assessment of Pacific education is needed if schooling is to be owned by local communities. As ably suggested by Thaman (1992),
education for Pacific peoples must be concerned with educational goals that reflect the values of local communities, schooling cultures that embrace those communities, and schooling environments that represent and are valued by Pacific peoples. A discourse on Pacific education must, therefore, go beyond issues of access and participation in schooling. It must include reforming our thinking about schooling so that it reflects and addresses our unique Pacific Island communities and their positions within a globalised world.

References


CHAPTER 7

Addressing Issues and Challenges Facing Pacific Education

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Introduction

This paper acknowledges that there are important challenges facing Pacific educators which need to be addressed. These challenges include improving achievement, coping with multiple roles, improving resources, developing teachers, and evaluating programmes. There is also a need to again examine overall goals and to ensure that learners’ cultural backgrounds are fully taken into account. The paper acknowledges that many worthwhile initiatives are ongoing in our countries and should not be ignored in any new suggested activities. Some suggestions of additional regional educational activities, especially research, are made.

This paper draws on my many years of experience as a teacher, teacher educator and, more recently, coordinator of and specialist in a regional basic education programme.

Issues

In a nutshell, there is growing concern at the failure of existing educational provisions to meet the needs and aspirations of each country. This points to a need to critically examine existing educational goals, programmes, and strategies, while continuing to implement current initiatives as effectively as possible.

Smallness of scale in most Pacific countries results in a limited capacity to attend to pressing management and administrative needs. Individual officers usually have multiple roles to play and may lack expertise in some of the areas, such as curriculum, teacher education, and assessment.
It is generally felt that achievement in key areas of the curriculum, especially literacy and numeracy, is not satisfactory. To enhance this achievement, as well as the overall quality of teaching and learning in classrooms, more than one variable needs to be addressed. Variables include the relevance of curricula, the range and quality of teaching and learning resources, professional development of teachers, and monitoring/evaluation of programmes.

Re-examining assumptions, goals, and practices

Critically examining the assumptions, goals, and practices that inform the present approaches to education in the Pacific has been haunting the education profession for some time. It would thus be useful to adopt a historical perspective, while examining present approaches and practices, so that we can learn from successes/failures of the earlier attempts.

Education also has to come to terms not only with local social, cultural, economic, and political factors, but also with globalisation. There is thus a challenge to ensure that the objectives, content, pedagogy, and resources of education take full account of learners’ cultural backgrounds and use them as a foundation for broadening their horizons. This challenge will translate into the selection of appropriate goals, knowledge, pedagogy etcetera, and justifying these choices on educational grounds.

This is a highly complex task and each country’s history and political vision would also come into play. In Fiji, for example, “democratic multiculturalism” is recommended in a major recent commission report. The report’s title itself “Learning Together: Directions for Education in the Fiji Islands”, reflects that education is expected to play a role in sustaining social cohesion. This may not be a priority in another Pacific country with less need to be concerned about ethnic relations. It should nevertheless be possible to work out general principles in education which could be adapted to each country’s context.

While there are a number of on-going national projects aimed at addressing known issues and problems, more can be done to directly target some of these. There is also a need to evaluate the impact of
various projects and activities and use the information for further planning and action.

While the second challenge of re-examining goals etcetera has attracted attention from time to time, the discussions seem to have been reserved for formal reports and little follow-up action has occurred. It is noteworthy, however, that at the practical level, teachers, training college staff, and teacher organisations have interrogated the relevance of espoused educational goals and related issues. One needs to tap into the pool of professional wisdom these practitioners have gathered over the years.

**Suggested Activities**

Further research is needed into the relevance of present education policies, programmes, and practices – building on initiatives already in progress and adopting a more inter-disciplinary, action research approach.

There is also a need to collect, synthesise, and disseminate knowledge on indigenous cultures, especially indigenous education. Links are therefore needed to student and parental motivation for education, and to national goals in order to promote dialogue on education among all concerned.

Finally, educational principles should be enunciated, based on research findings and critical analyses of present approaches to education that could guide future commitment at both policy and implementation levels. Key areas to cover would include: formal and non-formal education, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and language(s) of instruction.

**Conclusion**

Re-thinking Pacific education is a timely initiative. It will not be an overnight process and it needs to bring together collective wisdom of a wide range of Pacific educators, including the parents. It needs to draw on both past and present, looking at strengths and weaknesses so that
tomorrow’s children gain maximum benefit from their precious hours in school.
Introduction

In June 2000, a review was undertaken by the Fiji Islands Education commission/Panel (Learning Together 2000) to assess the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of Fiji’s education system. This review was long overdue as the last one was carried out over three decades ago. The report contains a comprehensive account of what needs to be done at the systems level to address issues of access, participation, and relevance at preschool, primary, and secondary levels of schooling.

A serious limitation of the Commission/Panel members, in my view, was their failure to question and interrogate the values, assumptions, and beliefs that underlie education and development. They took an uncritical view that formal education, in its current form, was a given. They did not question the philosophical or ideological foundations of that system. They did not question the neo-colonial configurations, often in negative formations, that the various elements of the education system had taken in Fiji. Nor did they specifically acknowledge that students’ own systems of knowing should be the basis for all other forms of knowing.

In this paper, I focus on what I perceive to be three key issues confronting education in Fiji. I begin by briefly sketching the background to these issues. The first key issue is to do with the cumbersome and inappropriate educational structures we have inherited as part of our colonial history and the fact that we have been so slow in effecting any significant changes. In particular, I discuss the basis of colonial power, namely the control of knowledge, history, language, and education. This is followed by a discussion of two other key issues facing Fijian education
with particular emphasis on the undervaluing of indigenous systems of knowledge and wisdom and the underachievement of indigenous people in schooling. The final part of the paper provides some insights about possibilities for future action.

**Main Challenges in Fiji’s Education System**

The key challenge facing Fiji’s education system today is how to rid itself of cumbersome and outdated educational structures and replace them, not only with culturally appropriate ones, but also with an education system that is in keeping with today’s changing times. The inherited colonial processes and structures of schooling have continued in neocolonial hegemonic formations, despite the fact that Fiji has been politically independent for over three decades.

Serious reflection and interrogation of the assumptions, processes, and consequences of Western schooling need to take place – not only in Fiji but in all school systems in the Pacific. The most salient challenge, in my view, is for Pacific Islanders to re-think and re-negotiate their way through their educational systems to determine what they would like to discard, what should be maintained, and what might be more appropriate alternatives for Pacific people. Given that Fiji was colonised for over a century, this would be a great challenge because the first step is a dismantling of the colonial dependency mentality that continues to grip the minds of formerly colonised peoples.

**Colonial power and control: knowledge, history, language and education**

Historical knowledge is problematic in Fiji. This is not surprising, given that the only history Fiji knows is the one drawn up for them by the British colonial system. The knowledge that is endemic to the people of Fiji is layered under Western interpretation and represented that way in the guise of history. The history one gets, therefore, is history as the “orientalist” perceived it. Western assumptions, knowledge, and outlook formed the basis for the interpretation and representation of the history of “Others”, including Fiji.
Western history books represented indigenous Fijians\(^1\) as primitive and ignorant. Missionaries were intent on transforming the “natives” and “heathens” who were regarded as the “very dregs of Mankind, or Human Nature (sic), dead and buried under the primeval curse, and nothing of them alive but the Brutal part.... “ (cited in France, 1969, p. 29). It was envisaged that a Western-type education would make Fijians less primitive. The British curriculum was institutionalised during colonial times. Missionaries, who were the initial teachers, did their best to inculcate Western values and attitudes in their students. Expatriate teachers from New Zealand and Australia (also British colonies), who were recruited to teach in Fiji before local teachers were trained, continued this after political independence. Today, despite the fact that local teachers now provide instruction, the curriculum is still pro-Western in its orientation, pedagogies, and content.

Language is a powerful control mechanism in a colonial situation. The English language became the legitimate official language during colonial times in Fiji. The Fijian alphabet was constructed by Western Christian missionaries as a first step in making the “natives” more understandable to Western society. Next, the English language became the language of instruction in schools. English texts were the source of knowledge about the world presented to the indigenous people and other ethnic groups in Fiji. Fanon (1967) argues that the best way of controlling a people is through the institutionalisation of the colonial language. This is certainly true for Fiji. Today, after almost three decades of independence, the colonial situation is still evident in the official use of the English language in schooling, communication, law, commerce, and administration. This dependence on the colonial language is an insidious legacy for a nation that has purportedly attained political self-determination.

**Colonial Curriculum**

The education of Fijians owes its beginnings to the Christian missions. The main purpose of Methodist mission schools was to evangelise the “natives” and for this purpose, the missionaries evolved an orthography for the Fijian language and translated parts of the Bible into this newly-

\(^1\) Hereafter referred to as Fijians.
written language. The curriculum for Fijians in the nineteenth century was, therefore, one which emphasised Christian doctrine and learning to read and write in the vernacular. Arithmetic and some vocational education were also provided (Mangubhai, 1984).

The missions controlled educational activity in Fiji for eight decades. This changed, however, when the Education Ordinances of 1916 and 1918 enabled the colonial government to take direct control by providing grants-in-aid in exchange for control over the curriculum, the language of instruction (it was stipulated that instruction had to be in English after Class 4) and school registration. Thus began the process of control that would ensure that the curriculum, school pedagogies, and the way that learning was evaluated would become hegemonic and normative.

The fact that English became the language of instruction is significant since one of the main features of colonial oppression is control over language (Ashcroft et al., 1989). The transmission of knowledge and culture is carried out through language. Language, then, becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of “truth”, “order”, and “reality” become established (Ashcroft et al., 1989 p. 7).

Through the English language, English culture formed the heart of the curriculum in colonial Fiji. For instance, a whole generation of primary school students in the 1940s and 1950s grew up on the New Method Readers, a series used in most tropical British colonies where they learned about such things as England’s four seasons, King Arthur, Rip Van Winkle, and the desert crossing in Egypt (Lal, 1992). The secondary school curriculum, set by Cambridge University, was heavily academic and exam-oriented. The literature component consisted of Shakespeare’s plays and the works of Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Jane Austin, and Robert Louis Stevenson (Lal, 1992). History students in 1951 were required to be familiar with topics ranging from the history of Fiji and the organisation of the colonial government to British imperial history and the history of the Renaissance and the Reformation (Lal, 1992). Local language, history, and culture were almost totally ignored in the curriculum.
Using the leverage of grants-in-aid, then, the Colonial Government was able to control the curriculum and the language in which it should be taught. Note here also the undermining of Fijian cultural knowledge and wisdom in the school curriculum. The secondary school curriculum was dictated by external examinations set in foreign lands. New Zealand continued to set the exams and, consequently, the curriculum until 1988, eighteen years after decolonisation occurred. So it was during colonial rule that the curriculum for primary and secondary schools was decided and this has continued in neocolonial hegemonic forms after the point of decolonisation.

**Undervaluing of Indigenous Systems of Knowledge and Wisdom, Language, and Culture**

There is widespread agreement that the current Western-oriented curriculum does not place much value on indigenous epistemologies, culture, and language. The historical basis for this is explained by Professor Konai Thaman, current Head of the School of Humanities at the University of the South Pacific, who points out (in Puamau, 1999, p. 265) that: “When schools were introduced, the missionaries just assumed that we had no knowledges and if we did, they were primitive and had nothing to do with cognitive process”. The result of this undermining of indigenous knowledges, she continues, is that Pacific Islanders “couldn’t use our knowledge as a context of thinking” but instead “had to use somebody else’s culture”, which has perpetuated the thinking that indigenous knowledge systems are “not a worthwhile context for intellectual pursuits”.

Likewise, Ali (in Puamau, 1999, p. 265) highlights how the colonial experience undervalued Fijian knowledge systems; they were not taken into account in the formal system of education of the day. This put the students at a disadvantage, because, reasons Ali, “we’re dealing with the Western body of knowledge and it takes time to acquire it”. He also emphasises that Fiji is still a relatively new nation and that Fijians may be facing difficulties coming to grips with schooling.

Thaman and Ali are referring to the “othering” process that occurs in the colonial encounter. The impact of colonialism on every facet of life
in Fiji was devastating. The underlying philosophy behind colonisation was that Western cultural values, language, and epistemological systems of knowing were superior to those of the colonised, and that colonised people were in need of civilising. It was nothing less than social engineering “to produce institutions and personalities that would be familiar to Europe” in order “to render the colonized predictable and controllable”, as Sardar et al. (1993) put it. It formed the rationale for the undervaluing or total annihilation of anything indigenous from the curriculum. This would explain why the teaching of the Fijian language, as a subject, is not seen as important, and this affects people’s sense of cultural identity.

Ilai Kuli, late parliamentarian, was of the view that “There is lip service to Fijian language and literature in the curriculum” (in Puamau, 1999, p. 266). In a similar way, Setareki Delana, Principal of Laucala Bay Secondary School and former President of the Fiji Principals’ Association, points out that Fijian knowledge, culture and language are “not adequately covered in school”. He maintains that it is important for Fijians to appreciate themselves first before learning other things. He states:

we should put more emphasis on the history of our land, our development in the past and understand our origin. It’s only when we have an appreciation of our own selves that we can appreciate our own culture and race. As (the curriculum) is Western-oriented, we think that the Fijian way is old-fashioned, backward and it has gone to the extent that people don’t respect their elders. (in Puamau, 1999, p. 266)

There is consensus that something ought to be done to ensure that more value is placed on the teaching of what is important to Fijians in formal schooling. For instance, the view that the Fijian language should be emphasised in school because of the functional value it has for communication, especially when a Fijian is in a position of leadership, is taken by a former Minister for Education, Ms Taufa Vakatale. Vakatale notes:
the sooner the Fijian students realise that what’s important is communication, they would see that the Fijian language is important ... They will be the leaders of the Fijians and you have got to be able to communicate with Fijians. You’ve got to be able to speak the language ... to know the norms and what is done ... I think we should make the ... young Fijians know that to know their customs and traditions and their basic Fijian-ness is functional, that it’s useful, that it serves a purpose and it’s not just being proud to be Fijians but that their very Fijian-ness will serve a function in their lives. (in Puamau, 1999, p. 267)

Moreover, there is the argument that the study of the Fijian language and culture should not be confined to Fijians alone but should be learned by all ethnic groups in Fiji. Dr Vijay Naidu, current Head of the School of Social and Economic Development at the University of the South Pacific, for example, gives several reasons for this. First, it would foster better understanding between Fijians and other ethnic groups. As well, Naidu notes that there would be greater “appreciation of the breadth and scope and relative complexity of Fijian cultures and traditions”. He points out that “there should be a greater appreciation of things Fijians because it’s a very rich culture, a very rich tradition and a very rich civilisation that is worthy of perpetuating in a very systematic way” (in Puamau, 1999, pp. 267-268). Giving the example of how “the old Fijian customs managed resources very well”, Naidu emphasises the point that “[t]he traditional methods of managing marine resources and an understanding of the seasons – when to do what – are worthy of retention and will make us a better people generally” (in Puamau, 1999, p. 268).

Ilai Kuli argues that the Fijian language should be taught in a meaningful way in the curriculum because “There is only one Fijian race in the world” (in Puamau, 1999, p. 268). Dr Ahmed Ali also maintains that Fijian should be taught as the most important language because Fiji “is the place where you will teach Fijian culture and language”. He suggests that all ethnic groups learn Fijian but he sees no need for Fijians to learn Hindi as Fijian “is the indigenous language” (in Puamau, 1999, p. 268).
Additionally, some informants have argued for a redefinition of the way Fijian culture and language is taught in the school because of the current emphasis on a Western framework. As evidence of this, Unaisi Nabobo notes:

We might want to teach Fijian culture and language in the schools but we are teaching it within a Western framework. We might want to redefine the framework, pedagogy, epistemology, everything ... I foresee classrooms outside, children taken on tours to see how pottery is made and so forth. (in Puamau, 1999, p. 268)

Further evidence for a reconceptualisation of the teaching of Fijian culture and language in schools is provided by Konai Helu Thaman (in Puamau, 1999, p. 269), who suggests that there are two ways of placing more value on Fijian culture and language in the formal school curriculum. One way is to have a special subject, perhaps to be called “Fijian Studies”, made compulsory for all Fijians to take. This would continue all the way up to form six. The other alternative, which Thaman favours, is “to incorporate Fijian knowledge, values and skills into every subject” be it Maths, Science, Commerce, or History. She admits that the second option is problematic because of the difficulties involved, such as knowledgeable teachers. Nevertheless, she supports this option, not only because the Fijian system has knowledges in all subject areas, but more importantly, the message will go across that this is a critical subject that is worthy of study. As Thaman argues, “if we can incorporate that in the different subjects, just think of the message and think how that is going to impact [on] the mind-sets of Fijians in the future”.

Similarly, Ilai Kuli (in Puamau, 1999, p. 269) would like to see “more emphasis on Fijian language and culture, more funding”. In particular, he suggests that the wisdom and knowledges that people “who could be regarded as libraries” have should be recorded before they die because “When we bury them, we’re burying a library”. This point is a crucial one as Fijian culture is predominantly oral. As Kuli and others have suggested, leaders need to recognise that indigenous knowledge and
wisdom are stored in memories and with the passing of the generation of people in their seventies and eighties, a reservoir of knowledge is disappearing unless efforts are made to store this in a retrievable form.

Other strategies are proposed by Mere Samisoni (in Puamau, 1999, p. 269), who points out that the Fijian language should be supported and used in as many places as possible. She suggests, for instance, that it be taken as a subject up to university level and that signs everywhere should also be in Fijian. In addition, it could be supported by private sector companies such as banks, even to the extent that visitors to Fiji be encouraged to learn to speak the language. She argues that Fijian values “must be part of our psyche and the images must be congruent with what we practice”.

To sum up, this section has looked at some representations of the undervaluing of Fijian cultural values, knowledge, and language in the formal school curriculum. The reason for this can be traced back to the introduction of formal schooling when the church and colonial government saw indigenous knowledge systems as primitive and unworthy for inclusion. This initial exclusion of things Fijian from the curriculum has continued. Moreover, while Fijian as a language is taught at school, it does not have the same status and value as academic subjects. This neglect is perceived by some informants as contributing to Fijian underachievement and the increase in the crime rate. As well, this neglect is seen as creating “half-baked” Fijians who are “accustomed to some halfway system” as Filimoni Jitoko (in Puamau, 1999, p. 270) puts it. There is so much to learn and be learned from indigenous knowledge systems that the general agreement is that not only should this be incorporated into the curriculum, but that everyone should learn it.

**Indigenous under-achievement**

The education of Fijians has been a matter of great concern as early as the 1910s, nearly a century ago. The colonial and postcolonial education reports since then have consistently pointed out the many challenges that have confronted Fijian education. The more prominent issues identified in these reports were/are those of spatial disadvantage
or “geographical scatter”, small class size and the related challenge of composite classes, a shortage of suitably trained teachers and school leaders, an economically impoverished rural base, and substandard teaching and learning conditions.

Arguably, the greatest national social or educational challenge facing postcolonial Fiji at independence in 1970 was the under-representation of the indigenous people in formal schooling, particularly at the upper secondary and tertiary levels. For instance, there were 2½ to 3 times more Indo-Fijians than Fijians accessing Form 6 in the 1970s and 1980s.

Just as seriously, Fijians were underachieving at these levels with consistently low pass rates and poor quality passes. For example, an average of 70 per cent of Fijians sitting the New Zealand University Entrance Exams failed yearly in the 1970s and 1980s and were not able to access higher education. In 1995, more than half of the Fijian students sitting the Fiji Seventh Form Exam failed (387 out of 871 passed).

Commensurate with this was the related under-representation of Fijians in middle and top-level positions in both the private and public sectors of the economy. There was therefore a dual “gap”, one educational and the other occupational, a recipe for potential social upheaval.

Three decades later, Subramani (2000, p. 9) acknowledged in the Fiji Education Report that “[e]ducation reform could take a pragmatic approach by giving Fijian education a central place on its agenda.” In fact, he specifically stated that “the issues concerning Fijian education could assume the key position as the major problem in Fiji’s education system”.

The Interim Government after George Speight’s civilian coup of May 2000 took this recommendation seriously because it spent considerable funding, time, and effort in developing educational strategies for the enhancement of Fijian education in a draft policy document entitled 20-Year Development Plan (2001-2020) for the Enhancement of Participation of Indigenous Fijians and Rotumans in the Socio-economic Development of Fiji (Fiji Government, 2001). Qarase’s government, after winning the 2001 general elections, has recommended affirmative
action for the education of Fijian children to the tune of $28 million.

Tied to the whole issue of the education of Fijians have been questions of access, equality of opportunity, relevance of learning, quality (and quantity) of resources, and equity issues. The perceived “educational gap” in terms of inputs and outputs between Fijians and other ethnic communities in Fiji has been a matter of great concern for past postcolonial governments and for the Fijian community since political independence took place in 1970 and continues to be regarded as an issue of serious consequence.

Fijian under-achievement in schooling can be attributed in large part to the inherited structures from our colonial past. For instance, a largely irrelevant and inappropriate school curriculum with foreign content taught in a foreign language, with an alien value system and epistemological base is not a good basis for meaningful learning. Additionally, teaching styles have been incongruent with students’ learning styles. Furthermore, an archaic assessment system has seriously disadvantaged many students. Moreover, there is a tendency by the community and students to equate failure in national exams with “failure” in life. There is a lot of truth in the claim that a clash in students’ home culture and the organisational culture of the school results in the inability of many students to cope with school life, irrespective of their race or ethnicity.

Related to these issues are high attrition rates, particularly at the upper secondary levels. There is the difficulty of affording the direct and indirect costs of education at the upper secondary level which is perhaps the main reason for the high drop-out rates. Poverty issues contribute to increased levels of Fijian underachievement at school. Increased social problems such as high unemployment rate, high crime rate, and a general breakdown in the cultural value systems are serious outcomes of the underachievement syndrome. The challenge is – what can be done to ensure that students’ experiences at school are meaningful, successful, and productive?
Transforming Fijian Education

There is, therefore, a great need to reconceptualise and develop an appropriate and relevant curriculum to encompass “local”, “regional”, and “global” knowledges. There is also a need to review schooling structures of assessment, pedagogies, organisation, culture, management, and administration. Just as importantly, we need to redefine the concepts of education and development and how best to merge the two.

We need to ask the following questions: What is education? What are we educating students and training human resources for? What kind of education do we want? How can we make it all-inclusive? What is development? What kind of social, economic, political, and spiritual development paradigms do we want to follow? How do we match the education system we want with the development models we wish to incorporate?

The Postcolonial Curriculum

In this redefinition, there should be acknowledgment and recognition that since we are both local and global citizens, a balance of both (all) worlds is needed. However, the first step, as Thaman (1992, p. 32) so aptly puts it, is to achieve cultural and linguistic literacy in one’s own culture. For Pacific nations, like Fiji, which have a multicultural and multilingual heritage, this is a necessary first step. It is imperative, therefore, that a culturally inclusive, culturally democratic curriculum is developed which has as its foundation the notion that the school system must build on what students already know or ought to know about their values and beliefs, their histories and world views, their languages, and their knowledge systems. To this effect, the following questions need to be asked and answered:

- What values and ideals would this reconceptualised curriculum uphold?
- What are its aims?
- What knowledge, attitudes, and skills would this culturally inclusive curriculum be taught in?
- What language would it be taught in?
- Who would decide what the content should be?
• Whose interests would such a curriculum serve?
• Who benefits from such a curriculum?
• What are the social, educational, economic, and political implications of this transformed curriculum?

In fact, any Pacific nation wishing to interrogate its educational system should earnestly and seriously attempt to answer these questions. Intensive consultations at all levels should take place, for the answers will provide the basic framework or an appropriately reconceptualised system.

Valuing Indigenous Fijian Epistemologies, Language, and Culture

As already discussed, there is an urgent need to place indigenous knowledges, wisdoms, and culture at the forefront of all other knowledge systems that students have to learn in the formal education system. It is critical that, before students move on to learning about the world, they learn about their own system. In other words, their own cultural knowledge system, language, arts and crafts, beliefs, values, and histories should form the basis for all other forms/kinds of knowing. There is, therefore, the need to integrate Fijian knowledge “within the official knowledge system which educational institutions often quite tightly guard” (Subramani, 2000, p. 9). This would, of course, have implications on policy formulation in this area.

More forcefully, Esther Williams (2000, p. 219) recommends that “The teaching of Fijian culture and traditions be included as a separate and compulsory subject in all schools”. Additionally, she suggests that “Fijian language be made compulsory and examinable for all students from Class 1 to Form 4 and up to Form 7 in all Fijian schools”. She further recommends the provision of resources for the training and development of teachers in this area as well as for the writing and production of appropriate texts. She adds that “[w]orking across disciplines, a systematic recording of known indigenous knowledge, traditional and oral literature, traditional health issues be documented and kept for posterity and research as well as used for teaching and learning” (Williams, 2000, p. 219).
Indigenous Underachievement

To illustrate the importance placed on Fijian education, the Fiji Education Commission/Panel Report devoted a whole chapter to it with a set of 31 recommendations (Williams, 2000, p. 179-225). Furthermore, the Fiji Ministry of Education launched a ten-year plan in December 2000 for the enhancement of the education of the Fijian community. It is entitled “Blueprint for Affirmative Action on Fijian Education”. The vision for Fijian education in this document is:

The development of a new generation of indigenous Fijians, proud of their traditions and cultural heritage and imbued with a hunger for education for individual development and success; and of a national society with indigenous Fijians competing successfully in all fields of endeavour towards national socio-economic development. (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 3)

The specific mission has been identified as:

To develop and transform all Fijian schools into centres of cultural and educational excellence to promote, facilitate, and provide the quality education and training Fijian students need for their own individual development, and to adequately equip them for life in a vibrant and developing economy. To inculcate into Fijian parents the understanding that education is the key to success in life and to therefore place the education of their children highest on their list of priorities. (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 4)

In order to fulfill this vision and mission, the foci of this plan is on the achievement of ten specific objectives, namely: strengthening community participation; conducting a review of current policies and establishment of legislation and regulation; access to quality education and training at all levels; upgrading the quality of Fijian teachers; management, financing, and monitoring all Fijian schools; meeting the needs of Fijian school leavers; strengthening education in rural
areas; increasing Fijian participation in higher education; establishment of standards, monitoring, and accountability in Fijian schools; and strengthening administrative support.

Furthermore, the newly-elected government in 2001 has endorsed the “20-Year Development Plan (2001-2020) for the Enhancement of Participation of Indigenous Fijians and Rotumans in the Socio-economic Development of Fiji” (Fiji Government, 2001). This national development plan has a specific chapter on education and recommends the following nine policy objectives:

- strengthening existing administrative structures
- equalising access, participation, and outcomes for Fijian students by 2020
- providing alternative employment pathways for Fijians in the schools curriculum
- promoting an education ethic in the Fijian community
- developing a comprehensive Fijian Studies curriculum
- strengthening research and information networks
- strengthening the education and training of Fijians
- development of programmes of study at teacher training institutions, and
- increasing funding for Fijian schools.

It needs to be stated categorically that these national plans for action for the enhancement of the education and future of Fijians can only succeed if there is a concerted and unified effort on all fronts and across all levels of society. Transparency and accountability are two criteria of good governance that must be built into the implementation phase of any plan of action.

Wide consultation at cabinet, parliament, Great Council of Chiefs, and at the institutional levels is necessary. Close liaison between officials of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Fijian affairs should take place. The efforts have to be properly coordinated between and across all levels of society.

Suitably qualified personnel are needed at senior levels to bring the dream to fruition. They need to be intellectually prepared, enthusiastic,
committed, and creative for successful implementation of the plans. As well, the community needs to be fully informed. There should be wide consultation at the provincial, district, and village levels. The non-Fijian community should also be tapped for their valuable insights into education and development.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have discussed what I believe to be the three key issues facing education in Fiji. First, I raised the point that, in order to move forward, people in positions of authority in Fiji must dismantle the dependency mindsets that are inherited by the colonised as part of any colonising project. We must displace all the hegemonic, neocolonial frameworks of doing things and this can only begin when we undertake a re-examination or interrogation of our colonial past. We must therefore seriously question the current education system and national development paradigms to identify their shortcomings and develop more culturally appropriate ways of doing things in the education system.

Secondly, I highlighted the deliberate neglect of the colonial “masters” in marginalising all forms of indigenous knowledge and history from the schooling process. This has had serious implications on identity formations of the Fijians who are grappling with maintaining their culture and language in a rapidly changing world.

The third key issue discussed in the paper is that of the persistent underachievement of Fijians in education (and business). I argued that part of the blame for the poor performance of Fijians in schooling can be attributed to our inherited educational structures: a heavily academic and exam-oriented curriculum which can be inappropriate and irrelevant; incongruent pedagogies/teaching styles in the classrooms; a foreign language used as the language of schooling; and a foreign school culture/organisation at odds with the home culture of many students.

In the last section of the paper, I provided some suggestions of possible solutions to transform Fijian education in these three key areas.
References


CHAPTER 9

Old Challenges, ‘New’ Responses to Educational Issues in Kiribati

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Introduction

The Republic of Kiribati, like many other developing countries, regards education as a primary means of achieving its national development objectives. This has been manifested on numerous occasions by successive statements of policy by the Tabai, Teannaki (1991), and Tito (Kiribati 1999c) governments, the respective governments’ annual budgetary allocations, and various reports. Kiribati allocates, on average, 20%, of its budget to the Ministry of Education, Training and Technology (METT). The METT consistently receives the highest budgetary allocations. In 1998, the ministry received about 22% (Kiribati, 1998) and in 1999, it was allocated 19% (Kiribati, 1999b). Despite this generous allocation of funds, numerous curriculum writing workshops, and reviews, there are still complaints about the inadequate number of appropriately qualified human resources in the country (Beroi, 1999), high push-out rates from secondary schools (Kiribati, 1992; 1999a), school-leavers who fit poorly into the society, and unsatisfactory pass rates in secondary schools and tertiary institutions. In other words, the education system is still largely failing to achieve its major goals. However, financial resources continue to be channeled towards programmes that almost mirror those unsuccessful undertakings implemented earlier.

The burning question that needs to be posed at this point in time is “Why is the country still failing to achieve all the objectives of education and development?” All reviews of the education system (e.g. Kiribati, 1992) and policies subsequently developed tended to concentrate on superficial inputs, processes, and outputs without paying adequate attention to the assumptions that underpin the education process. In my
opinion, the reasons for past and current unsatisfactory performances originated from sources deeper than the ones identified recently by the METT (Kiribati, 1992, 1996; Tiira, 1999). Timau Tiira (1999, p. 10), Chief Education Officer in the METT, writes that:

Almost by definition, the main constraints facing education in Kiribati are physical and administrative in nature. There are two types of physical constraints; the first is to do with the scarcity of resources in terms of capital and human resources. The second constraint refers to the physical characteristics of the country; the geographical remoteness between the small islands in Kiribati and their isolation to (sic.) the rest of the world.

While these are genuine problems in themselves, they represent superficial challenges only. The challenges are not only “physical and administrative in nature” but, more importantly, they are cultural and philosophical as well. A more important one is the chronic failure of planners to fully understand and appreciate the important roles that indigenous educational ideas and values play in the local learners and particularly in the formal education system. This is the crucial missing link in education in Kiribati. In other words, all previous developmental endeavours have been consistently ideologically alienated from the deeply-rooted cultural values that constitute the I-Kiribati learners’ worldviews.

The major argument is that educational planners and, more importantly, teachers and teacher educators in Kiribati, need to look critically inwards to their cultural roots to find solutions to many of the chronic educational problems confronting the country today. A sensitive incorporation of these into the curriculum, policy development processes, and pedagogical strategies would significantly assist in the development of a better and more effective education system.

The Challenges

While there are a number of challenges and issues confronting the
education system in Kiribati, I shall focus on just three of these, for I believe that they contribute to the existence of other challenges. The more I ruminate over the shortcomings of and the challenges facing the education system, the more I realise that the major challenges confronting the country are:

- the epic search for relevance of the school curriculum to life in Kiribati
- the lack of understanding and appreciation of the important role of indigenous educational philosophy and cultural values of the I-Kiribati
- heavy and almost exclusive dependency of development initiatives on foreign aid donors.

These three challenges are closely related and will be treated as such in this presentation. These are urgent problems and they need to be addressed expeditiously.

Relevance of the curriculum

It is widely accepted that education (formal, informal, and non-formal) exists to serve the needs of the society within which it is located. In turn, education ought to reflect both the nature and aspirations of that society. The problem in Kiribati is that the formal education system (in terms of its underlying assumptions, content and processes) is a foreign import that was initially established to serve needs and ends that were and are largely Western. In fact, the formal education system was established to teach the history, geography, language, arts. Mannerisms, and values of the colonial masters. As such, education became a very influential tool and force in the process of enculturation of the indigenous people by their colonial masters. Alien educational values have subsequently been firmly entrenched in the Kiribati education system.

The search for relevance in educational programmes in the Pacific started in earnest in the 1970s with an emphasis on self-reliance (Baba, 1986). This coincided with the achievement of political independence for Kiribati in 1979. In Kiribati, as in many other Pacific countries, this search for self-reliance was largely an attempt to re-discover and re-assert national identities after decades of domination by the alien
culture of the British colonial power. The call for the inclusion of cultural studies in education is, therefore, a postcolonial phenomenon. Konai Helu Thaman has been the leading “voice” in this movement.

There have been many attempts to produce more relevant curricula in Kiribati schools since self-government. These took the form of the introduction of Kiribati Studies, curriculum revision in other subjects, the establishment of community-based educational institutions (previously known as Community High schools [CHS] and now called rural training centres), and the development of locally based examinations.

When the Kiribati Studies programme (KS) was introduced (at different times) in primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions, it was greeted with much applause and hope. The introduction of the CHSs was also an attempt to provide a relevant curriculum for primary school-leavers. Both the KS programme and the CHS initiatives were perceived by policy makers and teachers as the way to make the curriculum more relevant to I-Kiribati students. On paper, the philosophical foundation of the KS programme and the CHS appear reasonably sound. However, it has been argued that the CHSs lacked sound theoretical foundations (Tewei 1985) and, in my view, the implementation strategies were questionable. The curricula in both programmes were taught as if the formal education system was the only system of education. In the case of the CHSs, the pedagogical approaches used were exactly identical to those in formal schools, although the nature and clientele were entirely different. Advisors (all expatriates) had helped to develop a curriculum that would “improve the living standard” of people in the outer islands and also preserve cultural skills like weaving and fishing. In these advisors’ view, the improvement of living standards included, among other things, the making of chairs from local materials – in a country where people have been perfectly comfortable sitting on the floor for millennia!

The lack of popular support and the eventual demise of the CHSs dearly demonstrated the inaccuracy and inappropriateness of the interpretations of the expatriate advisers regarding the needs of the clientele. It also demonstrated their ignorance of and blindness to indigenous educational values and practices and their potential impact. One example of this
ignorance was the advisors’ assumption that, when local experts were employed to impart their knowledge and skills in CHSs, they would impart their knowledge in totality, like Western-trained teachers. In line with practices in indigenous education, these local experts merely imparted a minute percentage of their repertoire of knowledge and withheld significant parts, thereby seriously undermining the CHS objectives. This clearly demonstrated a misunderstanding of – and a lack of appreciation of – the importance of indigenous educational values and practices.

Curriculum development per se is inherently a valuable exercise. Experience in Kiribati clearly shows that curriculum development focuses exclusively on content. However, no amount of curriculum development would necessarily lead to greater achievement by learners, if teachers are not fully aware of how learners acquire knowledge in their societies and how these impact upon learners’ absorptive capacity and orientation. Curriculum development alone is inadequate. Teachers have to look critically at the underlying notions of what indigenous teaching and learning is all about and how this impacts upon the learner and teacher operating in a formal education system. When learning occurs, it does so through a learner utilising his/her acquired notions of education, including indigenous ones. If the learning process is divorced from the context, the learning outcome becomes alienated from the local reality.

A part of the drive towards relevance in education was the change in examinations. During the colonial period, I-Kiribati students sat the UK-based Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE). After independence, the GCE was perceived to be largely inappropriate and irrelevant to the country. This resulted in the shift towards the New Zealand School Certificate (South Pacific Option). Even then, there was a lot of dissatisfaction, so the country started developing its own curriculum and examinations with the assistance of Australian and New Zealand aid, leading to the home-grown Kiribati National Certificate. Changes in examinations will be ongoing processes in the light of continuous developments in pedagogy, expansion of knowledge, and the rapid changes in the world today. However, these are likely to remain futile undertakings if planners and teachers continue to ignore
the total learning context within which the I-Kiribati student operates.

The education system is burdened with numerous examinations. The consequence of this is that teachers have been coerced into concentrating on examination – namely, Mathematics, English, and Kiribati Studies – at the expense of others. The inclusion of Kiribati Studies among the examination papers is a welcome development and a step in the right direction, even though it currently focuses only on language. The preparations used for examinations are, again, largely modelled along Western approaches and worldviews. In any case, examinations in various subjects, and promotion determined by performance in selected examinations serve little useful purpose other than to enforce an elitist education system. This elitist system is based on the assumption that the best students progressively proceed to higher levels of the education system, graduate, get deployed to the workforce, and then develop the country from there.

Education in Kiribati has largely been regarded as a means of achieving higher levels of development (Kiribati, 1999c; Teannaki, 1991). In practical terms, this translates as using education at all levels to produce the human resources needed by the country. At Independence in 1979, the main objective of the education policy was to:

provide, in association with the missions and churches, sufficient places in academic secondary schools to produce students who will fill the future needs for skilled technical, professional and administrative manpower. (Kiribati, 1979, p. 3)

This has remained virtually intact to this day.

Education, as an engine of growth, continues to be measured statistically in terms of, inter alia, Gross National Product, Gross Domestic Product, and employment rates. In education, there are persistent calls for quality and efficiency, both by the aid donors and the clientele. Educational administrators in the METT have tended to view efficiency in terms of (a) the pass rates in school examinations, and (b) the number of graduates who fill the manpower requirements in the country. This is reflective of
the view that education should serve a purely economic end – and that
development is measured in terms of economic indicators only.

This narrow perception is regarded by the author as an erroneous
assumption and approach to education. It is imprudent to subject
education, in the strictest sense of the term, to this narrow and perilous
perception. If education continues to be viewed this way, it is likely that
the problems outlined earlier in the presentation will remain. Learning
in schools will be geared exclusively towards the narrow purpose of
passing examinations at the expense of developing the child holistically.

If education continues to be viewed from the narrow functionalist
perspective of providing manpower requirements for the country, the
denial of the importance of indigenous forms of learning and teaching
is likely to continue. This will perpetuate the unpleasant cycle of failure
through the use and reinforcement of a largely alien mode of learning
amid a culture where indigenous forms of learning are still strong in the
total environment.

*The lack of understanding and appreciation of the important role
of indigenous educational philosophy and cultural values of the
I-Kiribati*

While the KS and CHS initiatives were welcome additions to the
system, a regrettable feature of the teacher-training programme at
Kiribati Teachers’ College (KTC) is the absence of courses that teach
trainees about indigenous educational processes and underlying values.
The KS programme at KTC merely teaches practical skills, language,
and traditional performance arts (KTC 2000); and the education courses
in the college do not include anything at all on indigenous education
(KTC 2000). When graduates complete their training programme they,
understandably, perpetuate the status quo.

It is, therefore, obvious that the training of primary and junior secondary
school teachers in the country also requires improvement. The situation
at KTC with regard to the more senior lecturers and their expatriate
counterparts reflects what Thaman (1999, p, 4) pointed out:

> Until recently, most people who trained our teachers
did not realise that Pacific cultures had their own theories and methods of education; and if they knew did not believe that these theories and ideas might be worth studying at college level.

This is due to the fact that the more senior KTC lecturers were trained as primary school teachers during the colonial period. Some of the degree holders were trained in institutions outside the small island states of the Pacific where there were no studies of Pacific indigenous education.

The teacher education programme at the USP offers the most promising and useful model to date. It is designed so that students begin their studies of educational philosophies and processes by looking at the indigenous ones first, before proceeding to study exogenous ones. The programme offers opportunities for students to learn about, critically analyse, and compare indigenous and Western educational philosophies, processes, and values. As such, it provides a useful model that could be adapted to suit various teacher education programmes, including the one at KTC, and then formally adopted. Younger lecturers at KTC are graduates of this USP teacher-training programme. It is an encouraging programme and a step in the right direction.

The United States Peace Corps is the only volunteer organisation in Kiribati that offers comprehensive pre-service, in-service, and post-service training programmes for its volunteers. These volunteers are expected to adapt and adjust to the lifestyle of the I-Kiribati in the communities where they serve. The volunteers are deployed by the US government to assist in the development of Kiribati in the critical areas of education and health. Peace Corps’ pre-service training is geared towards the acquisition of the vernacular language, familiarisation with roles and expectations, and a broad introduction to the Kiribati culture and society at large. However, this training stops short of initiating these volunteers into the realm of indigenous educational notions, values, and processes.

In a country where there has been a chronic shortage of qualified teachers (Biribo, 1999; Kiribati, 1992; Riwata, 1999; Teaero 1997), there has been a significant dependence on expatriate teachers who are recruited
mainly from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and, increasingly, from the USA through the Peace Corps. While the recruitment of expatriate teachers satisfies the quantitative requirements to some degree, it leaves a lot to be desired in terms of their knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the local culture, worldviews, and values. More importantly, these expatriate teachers do not possess any knowledge of the underlying indigenous educational ideas and processes that exist side by side with Western ones. The high turnover of expatriate teachers (averaging two years) makes systematic training extremely difficult. To some extent, this is a repetition of the situation in the colonial days. History appears to be repeating itself.

There is a hint of recognition by curriculum planners of the importance of cultural factors in learning. Tebakabo (1999, pp. 14-15) of the Curriculum Development and Research Centre in Kiribati writes that:

> All learning is culturally based. Effective learning is enhanced through social environmental and technological association. Pupils learn from existing experience and they build up their ‘schemas’ using traditional and culturally owned parameters. This links to pedagogues, resources, teaching aids, language of instruction and perception of teaching and learning protocols.

This is an encouraging sign.

The demands of the formal education system (based on exogenous values and processes) and those of the local informal and non-formal educational forms (based on the indigenous values and processes) are different and often conflicting. While there are some similarities between indigenous and Western values and practices in education (and hence potential for complementary coexistence), there are also significant inherent differences. An I-Kiribati school student is, therefore, compelled to work towards different and often conflicting demands. This is likely to culminate in conflict and confusion within the learner, which is clearly detrimental to his/her learning capacity.
In an attempt to provide access to secondary education for more I-Kiribati students, the government has embarked on the establishment of Junior secondary schools on all the islands of Kiribati. These are formal, academic schools that take in students for Forms 1-3 after primary school Class 7. While this may successfully (a) extend the boundaries of basic education, and (b) satiate the popular demand and need for greater access to junior secondary education, the core learning problems outlined earlier remain unaddressed.

The core problem remains. This is, as Thaman (1992, p. 100) writes, the fact that, “much of the contents as well as the methods of our formal education systems have been and continue to be based on mainly Western rather than indigenous belief systems”. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with Western belief systems per se. The problem lies squarely on the fact that these particular systems are being used among people whose belief and education systems differ markedly from the Western one – and they are expected to perform satisfactorily.

**Dependency of development initiatives on foreign aid donors**

Kiribati has depended and will continue to depend on aid for development projects for a long time. A significant proportion of the country’s development initiatives is dependent on foreign aid (Kiribati, 1998, 1999b). Through control of aid funds, donors are indirectly dictating, inter alia, the nature and directions of development in recipient countries (Luteru, 1991) including Kiribati. This becomes a vexatious problem in the light of the current climate of globalisation. Globalisation is poised to have significant and lasting effects and implications on a wide range of activities at all levels of education in the Pacific (Baba, 1999). The “intensification of global interconnectiveness” (McGrew, cited in Baba, 1999, p. 32) is likely to make it increasingly difficult for policy makers and educators in the country to assert their distinctive local needs and to promote their individual indigenous educational values and processes.

Development initiatives are heavily dependent on the economic well-being, policies, cultural, and other values prevalent in the donor country. In many instances, development models that have worked in other countries have simply been reproduced in Kiribati. One related and
important feature of globalisation, as pointed out by Baba (1999, p. 36) is the “increasing use of foreign aid to fund projects in line with donors’ interests”. This implies a lack of firm control by aided countries, such as Kiribati, of the thrust of their development directions and could prove detrimental to the genuine interests, needs, and cultures of the small island states of the Pacific.

**The way forward: Recommendations**

The people of a particular culture develop many distinctive ways of seeing the world from their own perspectives and contexts. This is commonly referred to as their “worldview”. These indigenous worldviews, in turn, become thought patterns and systems of logic peculiar to that culture. These ultimately become the foundations that guide action and behaviour (including learning behaviour) by members of that society. The theory of cultural relativism expounded by Franz Boas underscores the importance of the need to understand any ethnic group in its own culture-specific terms, as convincingly argued by Thaman (1992). The implication of this is that, if one understands the way a society acquires and imparts knowledge, one would be better placed to develop pedagogical strategies that are more conducive to effective learning by members of that society.

People in all cultures have worldviews and skills that are specifically suited for their environment, but situational characteristics or variables are important in allowing these skills to be used successfully. Cognitive differences tend to reside in the situation to which particular cognitive processes are applied. Teachers, particularly those without knowledge of indigenous educational values and processes, are likely to interpret this as a lack of cognitive ability. Reasons for failure, as perceived by non-indigenous observers, tend to be attributed to learners’ personal variables rather than cultural variables and situation-oriented variables like inappropriate teaching-learning strategies. Because of persistent silence among local learners, they have often been labelled non-communicative and even intellectually inferior. Such labelling has come largely from expatriate teachers (but not a few local teachers, too) who are ignorant of the Kiribati cultural norms regarding teaching and learning. According to the self-fulfilling prophecies argument,
teachers and students are, over time, likely to believe this and to behave accordingly (Rosenthal, 1968). This is damaging to the self-esteem and confidence of learners – the very people education systems should be assisting.

**Table 1:** Selected differences between Kiribati indigenous and Western education.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Kiribati Indigenous Education</strong></th>
<th><strong>Western Education</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives</strong></td>
<td>Preparation for life.</td>
<td>Preparation for passing exams and getting jobs. Extrinsic motivation to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intrinsic motivation to learn.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thrust</strong></td>
<td>Towards conformity and interdependence.</td>
<td>Towards change and analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source of knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Cultural beliefs and values.</td>
<td>Information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sacred origins.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highly selective.</strong></td>
<td>Highly selective.</td>
<td>Open.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge accepted as imparted by experts.</td>
<td>Knowledge accepted as imparted by experts.</td>
<td>Knowledge questioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learners’ personal orientation</strong></td>
<td>Quietly competitive. High autonomy.</td>
<td>Openly competitive. Low autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questioning by learners</strong></td>
<td>Discouraged and regarded as challenge to experts' authority.</td>
<td>Actively encouraged and practised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning modes</strong></td>
<td>Practical, personalised.</td>
<td>Theoretical, abstract and practical.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
When two or more cultures interact in the same location over a period of time, it is natural that some form of influence is exerted from one to the other especially from the dominant culture to the subordinate one. This includes learning and, more specifically in the context of this paper, the Western and indigenous cultures of learning. There are very significant differences between the two (see Table 1 for some examples). Learners cannot extricate themselves entirely from either without seriously compromising their learning achievements. They cannot divorce themselves from indigenous ways of learning because this is the system they are brought up in and continuously operate in, and neither can they divorce themselves from the Western academic culture of learning because that is the nature of learning in schools today.

It is, therefore, apparent that the I-Kiribati learner has and continues to march to the beat of two different and often very contrasting learning cultures. This has contributed to many unsatisfactory performances. The following strategies are recommended.

Professionals, both expatriate and local, who are key and active participants at various levels of the education system, need to be educated about the nature of the local culture in general and indigenous education in particular. These professionals include teacher educators, teachers (local and expatriate – especially the latter), educational policy makers, and foreign aid donors. It is anticipated that knowledge of this critical factor will lead to a deeper understanding and greater appreciation of the extent to which indigenous values play a part in I-Kiribati students’ motivation to learn. Assuming that these professionals already possess adequate knowledge of Western education, they would be in a good position to:

1. identify the strengths of both systems,
2. identify areas where these could play facilitative roles in

| Social context | Learning is person-oriented. Unity is emphasised. Interdependence is stressed. Knowledge and appreciation of customs is emphasised. | Learning is information-oriented. Individual achievement is the focus. |
students’ learning, and
3. formulate strategies to promote 2 above.

There is an urgent need for greater research into the nature of indigenous education in Kiribati and how this could be effectively incorporated, in a complementary and mutually enriching way, into the formal education system that has been the dominant system to date. Following such research, a sensible incorporation and meaningful application of these into the system is recommended. It is naive to push for a radical imposition of indigenous educational practices into what is really a totally Western institution. There is a critical need for a sensible, effective, and pragmatic balance between the two.

In the midst of the now all-encompassing globalisation reality, there is a need to select and develop an appropriate development model that is uniquely suited to the needs of the country. This may have to be a hybrid of existing ones and elements of local aspirations.

Conclusions

Kiribati invests significant proportions of its financial resources in education because it perceives this as the primary means of achieving higher levels of development. Despite this, the country continues to be plagued with unsatisfactory performances by learners. The problems are officially perceived to be physical and administrative in nature. However, it has been argued in this paper that the causes are deeper than that, being both philosophical and cultural in nature. The main reasons for failure are that the education system is Western and formal in nature and does not take into cognizance the I-Kiribati students’ indigenous values and practices in education, especially with regard to learning.

It is a perilous position to assume that culture is static and must be conserved in its archaic form. It evolves over time and the most appropriate components have survived to this day. One of these is how we acquire, preserve, and transmit knowledge. Formal education needs to work hand in hand with indigenous education if the I-Kiribati learner is to perform better, and more holistically prepare for life on these coral atolls. Appropriate incorporation of selected elements of culture
into the formal education process would lead to empowerment and emboldenment of the learners and, hence, greater motivation to learn.

The challenges and issues discussed are old ones. The solution proposed here is not a new one. It simply urges policy developers and teachers to start looking inwards at our comprehensive yet barely understood cultural beliefs and systems for appropriate solutions. It is useful to start from scrutinising indigenous educational philosophies, values, and processes.

References


Introduction

The debate about quality and relevancy of Pacific education is rooted in the belief that what we have in practice is not our own making. At the same time, we must take responsibility for its successes and failures. As educators, however, we seldom feel empowered to make appropriate changes to that system even as we deemed them necessary. The forces of globalisation, as well as the mandates of bilateral and multilateral aid, dictate the development policies that underpin our educational systems.

Education systems as they exist today in our island nations, particularly those in the U.S. American affiliated island nations in Micronesia, are still inspired largely by Western models. Moreover, there is no question that educational and social challenges faced by Pacific people in their own island communities and in overseas communities are a result of an educational system that does not build on the capabilities and resources children bring to it. The ability of this imported system to solve local problems remains largely suspect, yet we continue to tinker around the edges instead of making bold changes to the system. There is tension between the forces of globalisation and our deep desire to maintain, enhance, and keep vibrant our Pacific and cultural roots, an important quest for many Pacific educators. How do we maintain a balance in the face of strong forces for globalisation? The role of education in maintaining this balance becomes ever more critical. But what is the basis of this education we are talking about? What content knowledge, standards, and processes form the basis of this Pacific education? A critical examination of content, standards, and processes is the beginning step in the re-thinking process.
Western standards applied in Pacific contexts

Culturally passionate Pacific people who are re-thinking Pacific education might ask: to whom and by whose standards should we evaluate Pacific education – UN standards, former colonising country’s standards, Pacific standards, or each Pacific nation’s own standards set against its own development and institutional capacities, goals, and vision?

When we speak of Pacific Island students failing in metropolitan schools and in higher education institutions as a measure of success of our educational systems, by whose values are our students being judged as “failures”? What is the yardstick by which we should measure ourselves? We do live in a global world and, although we want to be globally competitive, it is imperative that we first be locally and regionally competitive.

In re-thinking Pacific education, it is crucial to take stock of the contextual realities within which our education systems exist. Some of the economic and social challenges we have to face as we look into the future are immense. For example, in the three Freely Associated States (FAS), they include extremely limited land-based resources, currently limited capacity to exploit large economic zones, dependence on a narrow range of primary commodities, exposure to frequent natural disasters, and emigration of scarce skilled human resources.

The common practice of judging Pacific Island students using Western standards is not practical, realistic, or even desirable. It is absolutely meaningless given the vast differences in economic and social contexts (see Tables 1, 2, and 3 below). Differences in gross domestic product, household, and population data illustrate the affluence of the United States in sharp contrast to the Freely Associated States. These differences highlight dramatically the different economic and social contexts against which development goals and education programmes are planned and carried out in each cultural milieu. For example, in 2000 the U.S. per capita income (PCI) was 25 times that of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (CIA, 2000; World Bank, 2000). As Pacific educators, how, or even why, would we compare our students, their lives, and performance...
levels to U. S. students? Is that a reasonable comparison, given the contextual and value differences?

**Table 1:** Comparison of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Per capita Income (PCI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>Total GDP in US$ (a)</th>
<th>GDP per capita in US$ (a)</th>
<th>PCI in US$ (b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>9,255,000,000,000</td>
<td>33,900</td>
<td>25,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSM</td>
<td>240,000,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>160,000,000</td>
<td>8,800</td>
<td>5,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMI</td>
<td>105,000,000</td>
<td>1,670</td>
<td>1,560</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (a) CIA, 2000, (b) World Bank, 2000

Housing and population statistics as shown in Tables 2 and 3 tell their own stories. The point is that our lives, our economies, our standards of living, and our priorities are vastly different. They are not comparable. So neither should our educational systems and standards be held up for comparison.

**Table 2:** Housing Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>Persons per household</th>
<th>% with refrigerators</th>
<th>% with public water</th>
<th>% with telephones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSM</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMI</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(USDOI, 1999)
Table 3: Population Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>Population (a)</th>
<th>Birth rate per 1000 (a)</th>
<th>Growth Rate (a)</th>
<th>Median Age (b)</th>
<th>% of population under 15 years (c)</th>
<th>Life Expectancy (a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>275,562,673</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>0.91%</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>21.25%</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMS</td>
<td>133,144</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>3.28%</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>18,766</td>
<td>19.88</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMI</td>
<td>68,126</td>
<td>45.17</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (a) CIA, 2000, (b) USDOI, 2000, (c) ADB (2000; 1999 Census: 12)

For a good part of this century, Pacific Islands development goals have been largely based on Western values and expectations. The critical issue of sustainability, in terms of human resources, and cultural and environmental impact, is only just beginning to be considered among important economic strategies for development planning. Moreover, the recognition that human resource development is critical and must be integrated in development planning has not been taken seriously. Hence, human resource development does not often get the concomitant resources it needs to produce skilled people for desired economic, political, and social outcomes. Education must be considered a “development issue” — a means of producing the human resources we need to meet our self-defined goals as nations and individuals.

Identifying challenges that confront Pacific education must be framed within existing Pacific cultures and value systems, as well as social and economic contexts and standards. Likewise, solutions and strategies must be framed in those contexts.

**Issues and challenges in Pacific Education**

In our everyday discussions as educators, we talk about educational challenges in terms of improved leadership, access to education, better
teacher training programmes, improved classroom facilities, increased resources, community and parent involvement and empowerment, and better curricula. Other sets of real and basic issues include the issues of priority given to education by government, the enforcement of education laws, and parents’ willingness and commitment towards education.

While these challenges are real in our everyday education world, they are also symptoms of larger issues that have to do with the belief and value systems that form the foundation of our educational systems, who we believe we are as people, and the vision we have for future generations. I would like to describe three critical, interrelated challenges, as I see them. These challenges may be more applicable to education in Micronesia.

**Pacific Cultural Framework for Education**

In most island societies, knowledge is the responsibility of the community. Education and learning take place as people live their lives. Education and knowledge are passed on through examples, not as a particular process. What we currently have in place are systems of education that ignore existing resources, cultural knowledge bases, hierarchical systems, and processes that are indigenous and familiar to Pacific people. Instead, in the current framework, knowledge is vested in “outsiders”, namely teachers, who are considered experts, and education limited to that which occurs in a school building. These models set institutions, or schools, apart from the communities they are set up to serve. This “hands off” policy has isolated parents, traditional and community leaders, and others in the community from the education process. Instead of empowering communities, the current system alienates the average adult from the education process, while schools become exclusive sources of knowledge. The result is that non-Western knowledge is devalued and neglected.

In addition, highly regarded cultural values and skills, including ethnoscience and ethnomathematics, have been replaced, rather than enhanced, with new knowledge in fields which are considered “modern” and more important. Traditional navigational knowledge, of extreme importance in the life of the Marshallese, is an example of highly regarded
knowledge that has been replaced by modern sailing technology. The traditional navigational knowledge system was developed over time, based on the context and culture of the Marshall Islands. Moreover, it was based on highly sophisticated mathematical ideas and the interplay of land, sea, and wind (Ascher, 1995). By its very nature, the system was both sustainable and technologically relevant to island life. Its skills and values were integrated into daily existence. On the other hand, modern sailing technology does not integrate with island life. It seems as though book learning and practical living are incompatible and cannot be integrated. This leads to the second challenge.

Relevance of Education

A sense of indecisiveness about the purpose of education and whose values should be taught has created split personalities for many Pacific Island educators. While we are saying it is important to maintain our traditional values and skills, that is not reflected in what is taught in schools. The necessary grounding in cultural values that is so necessary for identity development is not prioritised in education planning and policy developments. A balance has to be struck where education is supportive of culture and tradition but also stresses academic, technological, and vocational skills to live and be competitive in the modern world.

Education systems and policies are not clear whether they are educating students to be functional in rural island communities, to live in urban centers, to migrate to the closest metropolitan country, or all three. Job markets are not available in most island communities to absorb all school graduates, yet there is minimal focus in school to develop youths that are entrepreneurial and self-reliant.

The incongruity that people feel about what they can do, what is realistically available to them, and what they wish to become has serious social consequences. Some of these are low self-esteem, high suicide rates, and migration. The ambiguous education systems have created members of the younger generation who straddle the two worlds, Western and Pacific, and are neither “here” nor “there”. In many cases, neither foot is firmly on the ground in either Western or Pacific culture.
That is, they are not literate in their own culture, nor are they literate in the culture of their coloniser. Many live different and often conflicting standards and lifestyles and are often not sure how they should feel or think.

**Access to Education**

Compulsory primary education, for children aged 6 to 14, is the norm in most Pacific Island countries. There continues to be limited access to upper secondary and tertiary education. We need to move beyond the self-imposed restriction (based on outside assessment of what we should do) to universal secondary education and critically evaluate whether primary education can provide young people with the necessary skills to function in the contemporary island world.

More and more Pacific Islanders are migrating to the nearest metropolitan country, not only to seek better and higher education but, in some cases, for access to basic education. While access to educational opportunities has improved in the past decades, it has, unfortunately, not kept pace with population growth rates. The discrepancy between rural and urban communities in quality and level of educational programs available to children is also a concern. As people desire social mobility and economic opportunities, they seek better and more education. What they find in rural communities is considered inadequate to meet their demands and hopes. This has contributed to the out-migration from rural to urban centers, and outward to metropolitan countries. The greater the migration level, the less value outer islands schools will have in local eyes and levels of community support. This is a cycle that we see in most Pacific Island countries.

**Addressing Issues and Challenges**

Without going into great detail, I believe the following are starting points in terms of future strategies.

- To critically evaluate Pacific education systems, we have to decide on criteria to judge them by. That is, let us develop our own and create some regional standards, and integrate Western standards where appropriate. Western standards
are based on vastly different lives and expectations and resource levels; let us define our own.

- We need to review how Western education systems alienate Pacific Islanders from ownership and participation in the education process; denigrate traditional knowledge, values, skills, and ways of learning; and impose standards that make education irrelevant to anything more than living a Western lifestyle. Looking at it from another perspective, we need to review how, as independent people, we have participated in our own alienation and determine how we can gradually alter these patterns. A framework for Pacific education based on cultural knowledge, relationships, and ways of knowing needs to be explored.

- In order to reclaim education systems, there has to be a return to a more integrated view of development that emphasises human resource development within cultural, social, economic, and development goals and agendas. Long-term education policies must be envisioned for cultural integration, environmental sustainability, and accessibility of services to rural communities.

- If communities can reclaim ownership of their schools, educational programmes and curricula can be reorganized to (a) emphasise language development in both written and oral skills with a push toward multilingualism; (b) stress indigenous understanding of culture and history, past and present, and focus on ways to address current issues; (c) put in place curricula which are grounded in self-determination, cultural self-esteem, personal vision, and passion; (d) promote development of indigenous programmes and practices that will significantly improve academic achievement and critical thinking skills, reduce absenteeism and attrition, and reduce social problems among children and youth.

**Concluding Thoughts**

In summary, I believe a critical process must begin that forces Pacific Islanders to become more aware of how we have internalised, accepted,
and succumbed to Western knowledge, processes, and standards in our education systems, irrelevant as they may be. Part of the struggle to reconcile relevant Western standards, knowledge, and processes vis-a-vis our way of life is ensuring that teacher education focuses on enhancing teachers’ exposure to, and respect for local knowledge and skills, processes, values, and standards. As gatekeepers to information, it is incumbent on teachers to possess the content knowledge and strategies to ground students in indigenous knowledge and relationships before introducing Western ones.

Likewise, as we attempt to create a Pacific framework for education, we must envision students’ options, in conjunction with national development goals, absorptive capacities of island governments and economies, as well as the option to be internationally competitive. The basis of such a framework is a firm foundation in who Pacific students are, that is, emphasising their strong linguistic, value, and cultural base. The knowledge to be competitive internationally comes after, and should be supportive of a strong indigenous foundation.

The fast rate of migration to urban centers, and further outward to nearby metropolitan communities, is a serious threat that might undermine the cultural bases of island nations. The need to enhance and provide equitable services to rural communities, including schools, is part of the imperative to make outer islands attractive and viable for island residents. For schools, a consideration might be made to reduce the academic focus where appropriate and make schools more inclusive for communities.

Finally, national campaigns to convince government leaders about the significance of human resource development vis-a-vis overall national development goals, is essential in the Pacific region. Regional gatherings are important venues to share ideas, paradigms, and challenges, to learn from each other, and to further this important discussion. Our substandard education systems are a product of resource neglect by our own governments, community disregard of cultural and indigenous language foundations, and our own fascination and high regard for Western ideas and concepts over our Pacific ways. It is time to re-evaluate that and take stock of what we have to offer the world.
References


CHAPTER 11

Noman/Mbu Noman/Nuim: The Need for Wisdom in Our Curriculum

Michael A. Mel
University of Goroka

Parents, educators, and members of our communities have become sceptical about our education system. Some have even expressed disillusionment with education. In their view, education has lost its true value for our communities because it has not prepared our young people for life as meaningful participants in our communities. As one of PNG’s prominent thinkers and politicians wrote:

There seems to be general dissatisfaction about the type of education being offered ... we are breeding criminals, we are breeding discontented people, we are breeding people who are unable to understand their own cultures and who are unable to transcend their cultures and accept what is good in different ones. (Narakobi 1991: 20, 28)

What has gone wrong? Why is there scepticism and disillusionment? If education is not fulfilling people’s expectations, the question is: what options do we have? Answers to these questions have long been quests for contemporary education researchers in the region. One needs only to look at the plethora of researches, investigations, reviews, studies, and recommendations that have been published regarding various aspects of the education process. Curriculum, assessment, cultural relevancy, teacher education, and educational management plans and practices are some of the areas that have been investigated and discussed by people who are concerned with the kinds of societies we are building in our region for today and for the future. Despite all these efforts, to date we have not been able to find any definitive answers to alleviate our discontent.
I think this must be discussed in this colloquium. There are no immediate quick fixes. That much is true, but there are ways of coming to terms with these questions and possibly answering them if we are prepared to give our time and commitment. In order to move in that direction we need to establish clearly in our minds what kind of education we want to build for our people. As Matane (1991, p. 140) says: “if we want to improve the quality of education we must think more clearly about what it is that we value in education in order to define just exactly what we expect from [our system].” (Author’s emphasis.)

Presently, most of our people view contemporary education largely as a means to a job, an income, and an improved quality of life. Burnett (1999), in a study of parents’ perceptions of secondary education in I-Kiribati, identified parents’ desire for their children to obtain, among other things, a body of knowledge to improve their chances of cash employment. Narakobi (1991), Matane (1986, 1991) and Thaman (1995) have suggested that schools have been largely perceived as means to jobs in towns. Parents and relatives have held the view that their children who have a job will eventually bring home needed cash to them.

The dominance of this way of valuing education has bound all aspects of education (curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, teacher education, administrative development) to the single objective of enabling learners to acquire knowledge in order to develop their personal intellectual capacity and skills. Matters relating to the intellect have been referred to as matters of the head (where intellect is supposedly located) and skills as matters relating the hands (the physical body), training them to become deft in performing specific tasks. Teachers and learners all too often have been keen to fill minds up with the contents of books — almost akin to filling up empty vessels. Exams have become a feature in this process.

Unfortunately, this has not been an entirely happy journey, as Sir Paulias Matane, one of the architects of the new Philosophy of Education in PNG, commented. His report has become a watershed document that has provided the foundation for changes to the structure, curriculum, and teacher education in PNG’s education:
How many times have we heard stories like this: ‘I sent my child to school for 6 years but he has not learned anything’. ‘He cannot find a job and is causing trouble in the village’. ‘Last year he went to Moresby to look for a job and ended up in jail’. It seems schools are not fulfilling the expectations of many parents.’ (Matane 1991, pp. 139-140)

If education had been about preparing someone for life, the above comments indicate that this has not happened. The child “has not learnt anything”, “is causing trouble in the village”, and “ended up in jail”. This must raise concerns about the kind of people that are returning to their communities after completing school. The substance of these comments suggests that the “educated” youth are alienated from their communities. Parents and relatives ostracise the youths because they have failed to come up to expectations. Unable to cope and unaware of any way to find possible answers to difficulties, both the youths and the parents and relatives (the community) demonstrate their feelings of anger and frustration. The situation has been growing and seems untenable. Or is it?

If contemporary education is about cramming the head with facts, figures, formulas, and skills, what should we expect from our youth in circumstances that may require them to be creative and inventive? If communities value education as being about a job and an income, what do we expect from the community? We, as educators need to re-educate our communities about what our intentions are when we send our youth to get “educated” in our schools. The key point in this re-educating process is that getting educated is more than just preparing for a job and an income; it is to do with preparing our youth to be meaningful participants in our community. This is a rather tall order but, if we are to make any inroads into solving the crisis that is enveloping our communities, this will be one way. There are two points that are worth considering for these processes of re-education and reform.

Firstly, the present system of education, with its focus on developing only the intellect and skills in our youth, is leading to alienation. Our
youth need to feel that they are a part of our community. I am of the view that this is an aspect of education that is lacking today in our schools. Our youth spend almost all of their time in school, away from the community, and the community’s values and aspirations about what is useful and important do not get a place in the curriculum. How can we bridge the gap between the community with its values and aspirations and the intellectual growth and skills development promoted by the schools?

My second point concerns what indigenous communities meant by education as preparation for life. An exploration of this reveals some possible answers to the question above.

Our indigenous communities regarded and practised education as matters that concerned the hand, head, and the heart. These were not seen as discrete entities. They were interrelated components of an individual, and educating a person was about connecting all of these within each person.

Thaman (1995) describes the concepts of ako, ‘ilo, and poto as they relate to the Tongan worldview of the education process. Ako denoted teaching and learning; ‘ilo denoted knowledge and understanding; and poto related to having a good mind or intelligence. The three concepts are interrelated and cannot be entirely separated from each other although there has been some re-interpretation or “misunderstanding” of the older sense of poto. In contemporary education circles, poto means a person’s ability to read and write and do arithmetic while the older meaning related to a person maintaining good relations, having wisdom, and the ability and capacity to do something and to do it well under difficult and trying circumstances.

Another example is found in my own work (1995) which provides important philosophical background to the Mogei people in PNG. I describe three concepts of Noman, Mbu Noman, and Nuim. Noman relates to knowledge and knowledge creation in an individual. Noman is to do with thinking, feeling, doing, and knowing. Learning and acquiring knowledge is understood as developing the Noman. The skill and dexterity of an individual in speaking, knowledge of history
and social relationships, and showing respect for others relates to Mbu Noman. Someone who is able to display the skills of Mbu Noman is said to have attained the quality of Nuim. Nuim is not necessarily intelligence alone but an individual’s capacity to work with others and for others in difficult and demanding situations. To have attained the quality of Nuim was really about the getting of wisdom.

In giving recognition to and realising these three complementary components of education, the Mogei people saw that the process of education as a whole was really about character building. Character related to ideas like humility, responsibility over actions, respect for authority, giving, caring for people, and so on as much as growth of the intellect and skills. Students in the villages of a bygone era were not only taught the skills and knowledge to live but also how to live. The how was realised through the teaching of values. Character related to the values of a community. Values were like invisible glue that held the community together.

Preparing people for life meant not only ako, ‘ilo, or poto but all three together. Nor did it mean noman, mbu noman, or nuim as disparate entities. They were all inclusive. What is now needed in our schools today is to include these aspects in education. Western education should not be about intellectual knowledge (rational/cognition) and skills (practical/affective) alone, but include matters relating to the heart (emotional/sensibility). The community and its aspirations, its values, and beliefs must find a place alongside the two dominant aspects of contemporary education. All three are attributes of being human. Focusing on only two aspects will contribute to a person appearing knowledgeable and skilful, but lacking a certain capacity — the wisdom to recognise and live in a community.

Reintroducing our indigenous ways of preparing our young for life in our contemporary system of education will be hard because of the way Western education has had dominance in our peoples’ ways of thinking and of life. This is the second point I would like us to share and discuss in the process of re-education.
In his research, Burnett (1999) discusses the relationship between introduced western knowledge and I-Kiribati cultural knowledge, and makes a worthwhile contribution for us in this context. One of the main ideas Burnett establishes is that the Western body of knowledge has dominated and at the same time subjugated the local body of knowledge. In this process there is this hegemonic relationship where the Islanders undervalue the local knowledge because the dominant body of knowledge informs and constructs their perceptions and meanings of education. An apt example would be that of the dominant body of knowledge teaches a utilitarian view of education: going to school and successfully completing its expectations is the means to a job and an income. I-Kiribati cultural knowledge is identified in terms of skills and values through interviews. The skills relate to life skills in food gathering, home making, navigation, and so on while the values relate to respect, the mwaneaba system, family obligations, and behaviour. It appears in the discussion that contemporary education in Kiribati (knowledge/skills = jobs) is perceived to be important and little or no room is given to I-Kiribati skills and values.

The quest for us as educators in this colloquium will be to set ourselves the task of considering and making a list of things to do to counter this cultural hegemony. In order to countervail this hegemonic relationship we need to reassert and place indigenous processes of education alongside those from the Western context. Teaero (1999) recently suggested that this way of bringing both systems of education to the surface in our teacher education programmes would provide for our people an experience that can be emancipatory. It is worth citing Teaero (1999, p. 39) here:

Emancipation here refers to freedom from previous injustices inherent in earlier teacher education programs that featured the subjugation of studies of indigenous educational ideas to western ones. Such, emancipation would culminate in freedom from ignorance of our own indigenous educational ideas and reclamation of an important part of our cultural heritage ... [I]t liberates our students and us from the mental confines of exogenous philosophies of
education — a kind of colonisation of the mind.

In saying this, there is no suggestion that one system of education should throw out the other. There is a need to “strike a sensible and realistic balance between [indigenous] and exogenous educational ideas ... a complimentary co-existence” (Teaero 1999, p. 42) should be advocated. Nabobo and Teasdale (1995) also provide a useful pictorial model and discussion of such a process in a project they undertook with a course with trainee teachers at Lautoka of placing indigenous ideas alongside those of Western education in the curriculum of teacher education.

In order to attend to the issues of alienation and indigenous education, there will need to be a re-examination in the structure, organisation and delivery of the curriculum; a re-examination of the teacher education programmes; pedagogical practices; assessment; and, administration structures and practices. Also there will need to be the development of out-reach programmes to communities on the idea of educating our youth from kindergarten to University.

At this juncture of my presentation, I think it will be useful to share some real examples of what is being planned in the teacher education program at the University of Goroka, Papua New Guinea, where I am presently located. It will indicate to you that there are moves being made to address some of the scepticism and disillusionment being levelled at our systems of education in the region by our own people. Without doubt, the journey is only beginning; it will need to be continued and implemented, in our own practices as well.

The proposed Life Skills programme is really about Values Education: equipping our young teachers with not only the skills and knowledge to teach but also how to live as a teacher. In a community, for instance in a school, a village or a university, what are the values that, when practiced by a community, can become the glue that binds the community together and creates real community spirit? These are necessary questions that will need critical discussion and must be answered. The programme for Life Skills will need to be developed and, in doing so, focus on similar questions in building its courses.
These preparatory questions and discussions will centre on the idea of what kind of teacher the University wants to train. In the conventional sense, the teacher is seen as one who is a dispenser of knowledge and skills. However, if we are to look at the matters of the head, heart and hand inclusively, then the above definition of a teacher will need to be cast aside. It is becoming clear that, in the reform currently underway in PNG, teachers must help children to unfold their natural skills and talents. Teachers must help to recognise the children’s potential. It is also being emphasised that teachers must move away from preaching to students and, instead, teach through practical ideas and lived examples in their own behaviour and conduct. If those are some ways in which teacher preparation is moving under the reform then the University’s move to Life Skills is a way of realising the ideals being promoted by the National Department of Education.

Life Skills is not an area that can be dealt with under Religious Instruction or Religious Education alone. Quite often, ideas relating to humility, giving, forgiving, care and so on become associated with a particular subject. This is erroneous because all these aspects of life relate to living and are human values and should not be seen and treated as the domain of a specific bracket of knowledge and a specific subject. In addition, we must also recognise that Life Skills or things to do with Human Values cannot be seen as the purview of the Student Services Department alone. This means that the programmes the University puts together and the teaching of the courses will and must bear the hallmarks of the values that the University has in place in terms of teacher training.

The finest of our teachers should reflect the colours of ako, ‘ilo, and poto and those of noman, mbu noman, and nuim because we want to encourage and develop teachers who will live by example. Our teachers must cultivate love for their students and treat each child as if each one was his/her own. Discipline should be enforced with love and care. All of these must be realised by personal example.
References


CHAPTER 12

Personal Reflections on Education in Samoa

Tilianamua Afamasaga
National University of Samoa

After being involved in education in the past 30 years in Samoa and maybe because of the ageing process, I have of late often found myself pondering this question: “What has really been achieved in education in Samoa in the past 30 years? What improvements have been made in the schooling process? What constructive changes were made as a result of these changes, if any? What improvements have been made to our society?

I have spent over 20 years of my working life in teacher education. It is often quite interesting to pick up yet another report by yet another project mission and to read that “the quality of teachers in Samoa is low and they are ill-equipped to provide the appropriate education for Samoan children in the classroom”. Such reports usually fail to substantiate their claims, and subsequent project activities are allowed to continue, based on these vague assertions.

Teachers and teacher education in Samoa have been criticised throughout history. When “all is well” with the world, the role of education as an enabling institution is taken for granted. When things go wrong, teachers and the processes of teaching are blamed. In re-thinking Pacific education, there are two challenges. Firstly, what is Pacific education? Secondly, would it not be more appropriate to talk about re-thinking schooling rather than education? The distinction between schooling and education is obvious but, to conform to Western scholarship, I will reiterate some useful definitions of concepts that are often used in this presentation.

“Education is introduction to worthwhile learning” (Thaman, 1999, p. 1-2) and “Schooling is worthwhile learning that is organised and institutionalised” (ibid.). Most of us who are involved in this Colloquium
come from the world of the latter, a world which is exposed to the general opinions of a sometimes benign and sometimes vicious public, and evaluations carried out by the more systematic evaluators of foreign funded project teams which abound in our small Pacific countries. The personal reflections contained here refer to the context of schooling in Samoa. There are challenges and there are also issues worthy of deep reflection.

Schooling is an alien

Schooling in Samoa (and in the Pacific) is a totally foreign import, and thus an alienating force, threatening to transform our societies beyond recognition. The challenge has always been to Samoanise (indigenise) this institution so that it can be accommodated within the transformation of Samoan society. How to do this has been an important challenge in the past. Since the children are all Samoan, it took a while to get all the teachers to be Samoan. It is a though to ponder, however, that by keeping some of the teachers from other cultures they provide a rich source of cross-fertilisation of ideas that can only enrich the schooling experience for our children. The harder part has been to make it possible for all that worthwhile learning from our culture, our philosophers, and our sages to make inroads into the schooling experience, that is, into the school curriculum. The hardest part has been to make our people accept and recognise all that is worthwhile learning, so it becomes a task of education to carry out such promotional work. This makes the work of teacher education very difficult indeed. We have not even tried to make the physical appearance of the school to suit our tropical climate to enable the children to stay awake during the hot school day.

If schooling is an alien what does that make the teacher? And the principal?

The changing roles of the teacher based on Western contexts cannot be fully realised in our Pacific contexts. There are conditions that militate against it. The question of shortage of resources, low salaries, community expectations are a few of these. Our communities have certain expectations of our teachers — to be able to operate in schools as well as in their communities, playing certain roles. How should teacher
education respond to such expectations? There have been times when I have had to discuss with police administration and the theological colleges why they were taking so many teachers away from schools. Our teachers do acquire the knowledge and certain skills and attitudes which are desired by other professions, so we must have been doing something right in the past 30 years.

Teacher education in the Pacific has to contend with the fact that our teachers, when qualified, become marketable in the metropolitan countries, and there is no way we can compete against the salaries offered in New Zealand and Australia. There was a time when we seriously discussed with NZODA the fact that since we are training teachers in Samoa for New Zealand schools, they should help to boost the teacher education budget in Samoa. Perhaps that can be a future collaborative effort in teacher education in the Pacific.

The role of Pacific languages in schools

These include not only the vernaculars of the Pacific, but also English. One of the hardest tasks to be addressed by the educational planners in Samoa is that of conceptualising a school language policy; that is, the respective roles of English and Samoan as languages of instruction and as subjects in the curriculum. If this is difficult in Samoa; what is it like in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu?

“O la ta gagana o lo ta faasinomaga” (Le Tagaloa, 1998, p. 3) roughly translates as “our language is our heritage, our origin, our reason for being and belonging”. I would go even further and state that our languages mean even more than our fanua, particularly for the many expatriate Pacific communities overseas. Our language(s) give rise to our thoughts and our philosophies, and also give expression to our mauli, our unique souls. We merely gesture at language research in our Pacific communities. What dictionaries of our Pacific languages exist? Who compiled them? When our ministries/departments of education allocate consultancies for language work, do they give them to local people or overseas consultants? Who are your “gurus” in your language? The answers to these questions should give us food for thought.
Our schedules and practices

Much has been said about “Pacific time”, sometimes derogatory and other times with resigned tolerance. There was a time when the adage “the Pacific way” was fashionable. What has happened to this way? Did we stop trying to conceptualise it? Many of the issues of schooling are concerned with those of schedules and practices which are steeped in Western ideology and values. Time measurement, as we try to observe and acknowledge it, is Western in origin. Time management is a concept that we all espouse, yet, in most of our villages today, it is quite meaningless. The length and duration of learning time, concepts of what students are supposed to be able to do after a period of learning, derive from Western pedagogy. The ability of our schools to be able to have students repeat classes is determined by the World Bank and IMF monetary policies. Measured against such foreign concepts of time and schedules, we often fall short. Is it any wonder? Do we have a choice?

In terms of management and practices, we are often regarded as laid back, ad hoc and inconsistent. We are regarded as inefficient when we treat people as human beings — when we do not retire them at retirement age because they have grandchildren to bring up. We cannot implement the public service regulation of three days bereavement leave because observations, preparations, and the actual funeral normally take at least a week. Yet we have blithely sat back and accepted into our schooling systems the current “institutional strengthening projects” that are going on in our public service systems because we believe that the agents of the Market know best. These projects are putting in place even more unwieldy practices that have no way of working in our small systems with too few specialist people to carry out all the tasks that have been specified.

At this stage I would like to relate a Samoan crab story:

There was a basket of Chinese crabs and a basket of Samoan crabs. A Fijian was watching these baskets and, after a while, he noticed something quite strange. In the Chinese crab basket, when one crab climbed up, the crabs that followed helped to push the first one up and eventually it reached the top. In the Samoan
crab basket, however, the Fijian noticed that as one crab tried to climb up, the others would pull it down.

The story is told to explain the industriousness of the Chinese, and others, compared to the Samoans. However, upon further reflection, one of my colleagues said to me, “I would like to teach something different with this story”. I wondered what it could possibly be, and she said, “I prefer our practice because it means that, within Samoan society, no one gets to be too rich and create a gap between the haves and the have-nots, which plague more unstable societies. It is perhaps the best way to maintain equity and thus stability in our small society” (Esera, 2001). Too radical?

Perhaps. It is also possible that such is the complacency of our near homogenous society. The point that I wish to make, however, is that, in rethinking schooling in our Pacific societies, we must examine all the schedules and practices that hitherto we have tended to regard as sacred cows.

Our values and aspirations

The point about the need to constantly re-examine the purposes of education in our societies is eloquently made in various papers by Thaman (1990, 1999). It must be pointed out, however, that the aspirations of the Pacific people to be participants in the consumer world of the developed countries can often be better realised in metropolitan countries than at home. Hence, it makes sense to have an economic policy that includes as a strategy people as an export commodity. The high rate of foreign remittances by Samoans overseas, and their contribution to reducing what would otherwise be an unholy trade deficit, is a fact of life, and governments in Samoa have been thankful for this since political independence.

The cultural goods within our societies are bound to change with the evolution of the modern world. To me, it is not important that the object used to present the sua ta’i (recognition of status through the presentation of food) to visiting Samoan dignitaries in New Zealand is a can of soft drink rather than a green coconut. What is important is that
the Samoans in New Zealand value custom enough to practice this. In fact, it is a telling point about the non-formal and informal education that goes on outside school when Samoans in New Zealand, the USA, and Australia practice all the Samoan rituals for the life cycle events of births, marriages, and deaths. Yet they also contribute to all of these in their villages and their various aiga (kinship groups) in Samoa.

**Tackling structural problems with curriculum solutions**

This is an issue that may be peculiar to Samoa alone. Our dual system operated thus: at the end of eight years of primary schooling with almost universal school enrolment, children were selected for entry into three secondary schools, and all other children, about 80%, went to junior high schools. The curriculum for the latter was designed to enable a select number to move into senior secondary education, but the majority would leave school and become gainfully employed in village economic activities. The outcome of such a dual system was that only about 3% of the total post-primary enrolment was able to achieve senior secondary level. The inequities and inefficiencies were glaring. In the middle 1980s, Samoa put in place a policy that required a restructuring so that the junior secondary schools became part of a coherent system rather than an appendage to it. The strategy, however, was politically unacceptable. Fifteen years later, we are trying to implement a strategy which assumes that, by changing the curriculum, we would bring about a more equitable education system.

Such an attempt at using a curriculum solution to solve a structural problem has had the effect of confounding many issues in education in Samoa. Currently, the new, streamlined curriculum for secondary level has neither been well in-serviced nor adequately resourced. The evaluations carried out by a variety of foreign funded projects of the schools have all come out against the abilities of the teachers to implement the curriculum, so that now all the foreign funded projects in education in Samoa want to be involved in the in-servicing of teachers. Where does this leave the classroom teacher? All because a curriculum strategy was thought to be a solution to a structural problem.

In summary, this presentation states that in re-examining Pacific
education, there is a need to re-think-the following:

- the concept of schooling and schools in the Pacific
- the role(s) of the teacher and community expectations
- the role of language(s) in our schools
- our schedules and our practices
- our values and aspirations
- posing inadequate curricular solutions to structural issues.

Some suggestions for dealing with the issues are:

- indigenising schooling, or making Pacific schools our own, by not only including Pacific cultural knowledge in our curriculum but also re-thinking the structures of schooling as a Western import into our systems.
- providing for teacher education programmes that encompass not only the discipline of teaching but also the expectations of our communities.
- developing vernacular language policies that reflect the importance of these languages to the identity of the Pacific people, not only at home but also in the communities of metropolitan countries.
- validating our schedules and practices in the institution of the school.
- examining the sacred cows within our belief systems.
- maintaining cultural values through the use of changing cultural goods, and
- providing appropriate solutions to problems that arise.

I am happy for the opportunity to present these very personal reflections on education in Samoa. It is my hope that they may translate meaningfully to other Pacific Systems.
References

development for Pacific Island countries*. Paper presented at the
WCCI Regional Conference, Sydney.
Culture in Oceania*. Paper presented at the Innovations for
Effective Schooling Conference, Auckland.
Solomon Islands has just been through a period of social unrest. The harsh realities of the events over the past two years are being felt in all sectors of society. Basic services such as health and education would have almost ceased at the beginning of this year as the country plunged further into economic recession and chaos, had it not been for the assistance of some development partners.

The issues and challenges outlined below are, however, ones that would have existed even without the social unrest. They point to the need for Solomon Islands, as a nation, to take the important step of knowing itself and what its educational needs are before taking the outward step of seeking assistance.

The current status of Solomon Islands is bleak; the country is in economic difficulties and cannot sustain its educational services without donor assistance. However, when aid-funded projects are undertaken, we must make sure that we keep control of budgets and do a cost/benefit analysis before implementation. We need also to improve relations between expatriate consultants and local counterparts, avoiding possible feelings of superiority and inferiority.

The matter of ownership is of great importance. When projects involve expatriates, they are often seen as “foreign” and local participation is lacking or apathetic. Moreover, projects may not be sustainable as they depend on retaining the staff who were involved from the outset. A high turnover of staff may spell the demise of a project.

The relevance of the curriculum poses another problem. Parents expect that schooling will lead to employment, but they are not aware
of the realities of the employment sector, where, in fact, the rate of unemployment is high. A curriculum which relates to current realities and equips students for life is needed. Included in this, we need to develop courses on citizenship which address issues such as inter-cultural tolerance. Such a curriculum would need to be developed by Solomon Islanders rather than imposed by overseas consultants, and it must take into account how Solomon Islanders learn, an area which needs research.

When it comes to access, we all dream of a fully educated population as in the Education for All goals. Secondly, we want all the population to have access, including the minority groups. This means full gender balance and the development or enhancement of distance learning opportunities to give better access for disadvantaged groups such as the rural dwellers.

As an essential preliminary to this development, our national goals need to be re-examined, as well as some educational assumptions which still prevail. One of these is the filling model which assumes that students’ minds are blank slates and therefore they must be taught everything, including how to know. Another is the factory model which assumes that students need to behave in certain ways and must be assisted to change if they do not conform. The traditional way of learning by doing has been forgotten and needs to be revived.

Solomon Islands is a young, developing nation, which certainly needs skilled practitioners: teachers, engineers, tradespeople, doctors, machinists, agriculturalists, etcetera. However, we must beware of the danger of over-educating our young people and awarding formal qualifications that are not supported by sufficient practical experience. The education they receive must have practical relevance.

Western thought has been shaped by changing worldviews over the past centuries; from theism to deism to naturalism to existentialism and now postmodernism. These shifts have in turn affected how nations view knowledge and the understanding of knowledge, as reflected in educational theories, such as cognitivism, behaviourism, and constructivism. Huge mind leaps have been demanded, especially as a
result of the many external aid-funded educational projects, which have left behind confusion among Solomon Island educational planners, practitioners, and participants rather than enlightenment.

Regional/National capacity building is vital so that our own educators are empowered. This also means an added or expanding role for the University of the South Pacific’s Institute of Education.

These issues all point to a need to:

- undertake holistic national strategic planning to avoid the danger of fragmentation and ensuing isolation
- conduct a national education review, and
- draw up a plan which should contain immediate, medium, and long-term goals and objectives with related plans for action.

This strategic planning will require off-shore funding. A new understanding and strategy needs to be confirmed with aid donors to facilitate the planning. This should include building confidence in availing project financing to national institutions to access financing.

As a preliminary, educational stakeholders must be convinced of the need for change. This will be a challenge, as will convincing the government of the day. Wisdom will be needed. A regional approach is desirable, to give encouragement and support, especially to nations that may view the Colloquium outcomes as radical. In order to implement the plan, national representatives will need to start organising national conferences on issues raised in this Colloquium and appoint a national committee to coordinate the reform. This committee should include the Ministry of Education. In addition, a regional coordinating body needs to be established to organise regional conferences for updating, reviewing, and sharing ideas and developments.

With appropriate leadership and guidance and with greater national control, the future of education in our region should be bright.
I begin by asking the question: What is Pacific education? Does it exist as an actual entity, or is it an ideal? I have no answers, knowing that each country operates its own system of schooling, based on relevance to its own context, and helped (or hindered?) by a number of philosophies from beyond the Pacific. For this and other reasons, people may differ on what they think constitutes the often-heard concept of Pacific education.

Tokelau: Returning to the village

The “return to the village” idea underpins all development in Tokelau, and will impact on the future direction of schooling processes. The idea involves the empowering of village institutions in relation to decision-making processes on political, social, and economic issues. Since the 1980s, we have tried to centralise the Education Department, having its headquarters based on one of the three atolls. At the same time a Curriculum Development Unit was created, and a national Form five class which each atoll hosted for five consecutive years on a rotational basis. These initiatives did not work or live up to expectations because of problems specific to Tokelau.

We are returning the schools to the villages in the near future. Local village councils and PTAs will make major decisions with the assistance of local and visiting advisers. Because of the problem of retaining teaching and administrative staff, villages will be freer to recruit or develop their own human resource requirements. A few will remain in headquarters to monitor national standards and liaise with regional and international organisations.

The following issues have been brought up in many discussions in Tokelau and I summarise them here to encourage debate and with the
hope of finding some answers.

**The learner: Contexts and environments**

Different education systems have been promoting cultural and vernacular learning built into local syllabuses but it is difficult to see any attempt to link traditional learning and school learning. The world of the classroom seems too foreign to students because, instead of applying the sciences, mathematics, and other subjects to lived-experiences, most concepts have to be rote-learned in order to pass the ultimate — external exams. The textbooks used for each syllabus are evidence of this: physics is not related to rowing, planting, or weaving activities, but memorised word for word from textbooks and dictionaries. Instead of enjoying their own authentic history and literature, students concentrate on those that are examined. This is not a criticism of Western knowledge, which is a crucial aspect of everyday learning; it is an argument for using the two to complement each other by applying textbook knowledge to children’s lived experiences and the texts they learn from. There is a need to create ways whereby students can transcend the boundaries within the different environments they interact with in their daily life: the classroom and their local environment. At the same time, educators must seek an approach that would enable them to create a balance between the “schooling [and learning] is a good thing in itself” and the “academic success only” ideologies.

**Rigidity of classroom practices**

Many traditional classroom processes are questionable. Why do we have the types of time-tabling we have at present? Do children maintain an interest in learning throughout the time they are required to be at school? Classrooms appear to be too classroom-centered, at the expense of the learner’s physical and social environments. This aspect of schooling requires a very serious re-think.

Are schools failing to develop the different talents seen among the different learners from a very early age? Why are some students relatively advanced while others decide to miss or evade school altogether? Why are a number of children seen fishing or engaging in economic activities
during school hours?

The issues highlighted here are not new, and this brief discussion is question-focused. An appropriate start could be the questioning of current practices in a critical way, to establish a more valid justification for institutionalised schools. Life histories and experiences of current and post-secondary students including the schooling experiences of Pacific educators would be of great help.

**Extending some of the issues**

I would like to acknowledge a number of colleagues and visiting teachers who have shared their ideas with me on these issues. The following reflects the ideas that came up in lengthy discussions with Shirley Price, a visiting teacher who was in Tokelau in connection with UNESCO assistance. Visiting teachers include those from institutions such as the USP, SPBEA, and (NZ)VSA.

*English as the language of instruction and examination in senior school*

This creates problems for many of the students and impacts on what they learn. When students are struggling with a language that is so different to their first language, pronunciation, structure, and vocabulary, the easiest way of teaching and assessing is by students copying notes and rote learning for written assessment tests. Students are very good at this and those with the best memories are the ones that ‘pass’. This does not, however, give them the thinking skills needed for study at senior secondary or tertiary level. Teachers are not necessarily aware of the difficulties of learning in a second language and cannot always help students with the strategies for overcoming them. Specialised subject vocabulary, specific language, and ways of presentation of different subjects is less “automatic” for second language speakers than it is for first language speakers and needs to be taught. Critical thinking and problem-solving are often language dependent and students do not have the language or the skills for either.
Split between traditional methods of learning and imported methodology

Traditionally, learning was oral and transmitted through demonstration, song, storytelling, dance, and drama. Societies were organised on the principal of the importance of the group, and co-operative skills were necessary for survival. Imported education from 19th century England emphasised written learning that is individual, sitting separately in straight rows, and not talking to fellow students. This is still a feature of most Pacific education systems. The majority of testing is written examinations or tests and silence is still seen as the best learning environment. Noisy classrooms are disapproved of.

Assessment

This is still predominantly written tests and exams to get first, second, and third in class, and to select students to go on for further study at secondary or tertiary institutions. Students are still ranked and tests/assessments are norm referenced. Emphasis is on being better than your peers rather than setting standards of excellence and working towards these. The Cook Islands and Niue could start to address this by emphasising standards rather than the ranked list and by having assessment that is not all written.

Narrow curriculum

Too many of the schools teach the traditional “academic” subjects in a very narrow way. This does not provide a balanced holistic education or recognise the diverse talents of the students. Subjects like music, physical education, and the arts are undervalued, as are the practical subjects.

Option choice is narrow for students, and they are often forced to choose between subjects, such as Graphics and Art, when they should be able to do both. Students who do not have the skills or the interest to do five academic subjects for national exams are being forced into these paths because of option lines. This could be partly a resourcing issue; it is more expensive to teach subjects that require musical instruments,
sports equipment, lathes, sewing machines, stoves, wheelbarrows, forks, seeds, paint, etcetera than it is to teach out of a text book.

\textbf{Resources — Human and physical}

Resources are a major challenge to education in all countries and is probably worse in the Pacific because of the small population base and the lack of economic independence of many of the countries. There are a few good local resources but many that are bought in from overseas are too difficult or irrelevant to the local environment. Pacific institutions do not have access to the same resources as schools in bigger countries and cannot always make good decisions. Human resources continue to be a problem and this is linked again to money. Salaries are low and people are tempted to work overseas or in other sectors. Insufficient numbers of people are being trained.

\textbf{Conclusion}

I should like to conclude by reiterating the need for, firstly, a national approach with new strategies tailored to each nation’s needs, and then a regional approach which can benefit all the Pacific nations collectively.
CHAPTER 15

Reflections on Vanuatu Education System

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Introduction

This paper is based on my personal reflection of education in Vanuatu for ni-Vanuatu people. My observations relate to the system as a whole as opposed to a particular sector of education. They are based on my accumulated experience as a student, teacher, school principal, and a ni-Vanuatu educator over a number of decades. The choice of issues covered in the paper is restricted to ones that I consider critical, particularly from the perspective of a high school principal. These issues include: the duality of systems, purposes of education, outcomes of education, and sustainability of the systems. Some suggestions on what and how to address the issues are offered.

Before I discuss the critical issues facing Vanuatu education, a brief outline of Vanuatu society and education in Vanuatu is necessary to set the context.

Vanuatu society

The Republic of Vanuatu is made up of 170,000 people, mostly Melanesians, speaking more than 108 languages and living in a cluster of 83 islands in the South Pacific Ocean. From 1906 to 1980, the islands were a Condominium, administered jointly by the United Kingdom and France. For the ni-Vanuatu people, the colonial experience was a duality of competing systems of education, law, health, police, prisons, citizenship, currency, and language.

Vanuatu gained political independence in 1980 and has adopted a Westminster model of government with a Prime Minister and a local Head of State. There is a council of chiefs, but its role is limited to
matters concerning custom and island traditions. Bislama is the national language, and English and French are official languages.

The majority of ni-Vanuatu people live in and actively participate in rural village communities. They own their land and seas and obtain sustenance from these as and when they need it. Some small-scale cash activities are also common in village settings. The two major townships of Port Vila (on Efate Island) and Luganville (on Santo Island) are home to only about 20% of the population. Port Vila is the seat of government and all structures of the economy, government, transportation, and communication revolve around the capital.

**Education**

Vanuatu inherited its dual education system from the joint colonial administration of the British and the French. Consequently, there is an Anglophone system and a Francophone system with two media of instruction, two curricula, two philosophies of schooling, and two management systems. These school systems exist separately at pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels. At the tertiary level, where such educational institutions exist in Vanuatu, they operate along similar lines. The government, the churches, the private sector, and local communities administer schools.

Access to primary schooling is almost universal, but this is not the case at secondary and tertiary levels. Of the total 35,083 students in primary schools, about 78% are studying in Anglophone primary schools while the rest are in Francophone schools (Vanuatu Ministry of Education, 2000a). In both systems, there are limited spaces available in secondary schools; in 2000, only 8,408 students had access to secondary level places. Of this total, students in Anglophone schools make up 60% of the total secondary school students. The selection of students into the secondary system is in favour of Francophone students as a result of the government’s decision in 1990 to increase the number of French speaking secondary schools to equal the number of English speaking schools. As there are far fewer Class 6 students in the French speaking schools than in the English speaking schools, a higher proportion of French speaking students have access to the secondary schools.
Private providers offer technical and vocational education although some government secondary schools have also started offering courses of this nature. In 2000, the total teaching force was 2,064 of which males constituted 64% and females 36% (Vanuatu Ministry of Education, 2000a).

**Critical issues facing education in Vanuatu**

*The duality of systems*

As mentioned earlier, Vanuatu inherited two systems of education from the colonial administration. Since 1980, successive governments have tried to support the two systems. The support of the systems varies according to which coalition of political parties is in power. This is because political parties are often organised along Anglophone-Francophone lines and stay in power for relatively short periods.

Since attaining political independence, Vanuatu has worked towards amalgamating the two colonial systems of education. Presently, the primary school (Years 1-6) curriculum is receiving some attention. The curriculum of the junior secondary school has already been amalgamated to some extent although instruction is still in either English or French. The senior secondary systems still operate separately. One of the reasons for amalgamation is to address issues of relevance and appropriateness to the local situation, because neither the Anglophone nor the Francophone education systems did so.

The differences between the colonial education systems and ni-Vanuatu notions of education are significant. School and the schooling process are unfamiliar to ni-Vanuatu parents, and this inhibits their full participation. In other words, the nature of the school system limits the extent to which ni-Vanuatu parents can be involved in the education of their children. On the other hand, ni-Vanuatu parents are more comfortable with educating their children in the skills and knowledge required at home, for the education that takes place at home is based on the cultures of Vanuatu while the schooling experience remains alien.

Further differences between the colonial education systems and ni-
Vanuatu notions of education are evident. The school, for instance, promotes individualism through its examination and assessment systems, its styles of teaching and learning, and its selection procedures. In contrast, ni-Vanuatu cultures educate their young to be participating members of their communities. In addition, schools teach abstract ideas, which are often foreign to the students while in ni-Vanuatu cultures, the young learn through experiences related to their physical, social, and spiritual environments. Because its ideas are abstract and foreign to ni-Vanuatu cultures, control of the school institution and schooling remains outside the worldview of ni-Vanuatu people. Consequently, ni-Vanuatu communities cannot adequately manage the school system.

The critical point for consideration is that both the Anglophone and Francophone systems of education in Vanuatu are culturally unfamiliar territories for ni-Vanuatu students and parents. Their “failure” in these education systems is due to the inappropriateness of these systems, and not the inability of students to learn or parents to support that learning.

**Purpose of education**

After two decades of political independence, Vanuatu has yet to seriously question what it wants out of its education system. Instead, the country has continued to manage the dual education system it inherited from its colonial past. This is in spite of the intention, expressed at the point of attaining political independence, that the dual education system was to be amalgamated, into a single Vanuatu education system. Twenty years on, Vanuatu still has instruction in both languages, and senior secondary curricula are still different for the two systems. This may be explained in a number of ways.

First, Vanuatu education has not received the needed leadership, either politically or professionally. Those who might have offered leadership for education have become preoccupied with administering schools and managing education projects at the cost of providing a vision for Vanuatu education. Second, ni-Vanuatu parents seem to have placed a blind hope in schools and what these institutions might offer for their children and communities. Recently, more and more parents have realised that schools have not produced the desired results. Instead,
children have come out of schools restricted in needed skills and knowledge, unfamiliar with their customs and traditions, and limited in their linguistic and cultural competencies. Third, it may be that ni-Vanuatu people have become locked into a colonial mindset, thereby accepting the educational realities as “a given” without regard for a conscious re-examination of their educational realities.

The critical point for attention here is the need for a clarified vision of education for ni-Vanuatu people. Ni-Vanuatu people need to ask a number of fundamental questions such as: What societal goals should education serve? How should these be prioritised? What values and skills should our children possess? How should we share the responsibilities for education?

**Outcomes of education**

Like students everywhere, ni-Vanuatu students are multi-gifted and learn in different ways. However, the present education system does not appear to recognise this. Instead, it rejects ni-Vanuatu children rather than accommodating and nourishing them as individuals. For instance, of all children that enter primary school, only 0.2% will have a chance to go to university. Of all students completing primary school (at Year 6), only 55% make it to secondary school.

Moreover, the school system is academically oriented at the cost of a more vocational/technical training. The majority that are pushed out of the formal education system are therefore denied opportunities for alternative educational pathways. Many find themselves unable to obtain jobs because of their poor skills for the world of work. Consequently, there is a growing number of ni-Vanuatu youth with a sense of failure, hopelessness, and uselessness — preconditions for social disorder and a societal time-bomb in the making.

The critical point for attention here is that our current education system promotes the systematic rejection of individuals, branding them as failures, instilling in them a loss of self-confidence, and failing to nurture them as learners. Without immediate attention to these matters, Vanuatu society is likely to face greater social problems than it would
otherwise face.

**Sustainability of the system**

The Vanuatu education system is costly for what it delivers, or rather, fails to deliver. During the period 1999-2000, the Vanuatu education budget represented nearly 25% of the annual government revenue (Vanuatu Ministry of Education, 2000b) though this level has not been consistently maintained. Of the total resources available for education, more than 18% are aid-in-kind from foreign sources. With or without aid, the education sector receives the highest budgetary support from the government. In spite of such a level of budgetary support, schools remain poorly resourced, access to secondary levels remains a concern, teacher shortage at the secondary schools continues to be a feature, and performance in external examinations is inconsistent.

The distribution of junior secondary schools throughout the provinces, though politically favoured, is expensive to maintain. In addition, the policy of two media of instruction, English and French, stretch already thin resources further. Often this results in duplication of work and costs. The costs of education in Vanuatu are also increased by political instability. Frequent changes in government often result in changes in key personnel and policies.

The point of importance here is that Vanuatu education is a resource-demand system. The resources needed, however, are not available within local communities so, unless these come from outside, local communities cannot afford to maintain educational quality within the present system.

**Recommendations**

If educational progress is to be achieved for ni-Vanuatu communities, the following recommendations need to be implemented.

- Vanuatu must contextualise its education system so that it is grounded in the cultures of its local communities. Local knowledge and wisdom must be part of the educational experience. The use of local resources and appropriate
materials that are familiar to the local communities empowers
the community to own and administer education. In this
way parents and communities can actively participate in
education. The use of contextually appropriate and relevant
resources also increases the ability of local communities to
sustain and maintain quality education.

- Vanuatu must clarify what it wants of its education system.
  This process begins with a systematic examination of what
  works and what does not work in the present education
  system. Political administrative and professional leaders in
  Vanuatu education must not shy away from exposing the
  strengths and deficiencies of the system and changing it,
  where necessary.

- Ni-Vanuatu educators can assist politicians and senior
  education administrators to articulate critical issues and
  facilitate healthy discourse on the issues, as a step towards
  clarifying the vision of and goals for education in Vanuatu.

- Vanuatu education must concern itself with educating all
  ni-Vanuatu children for worthwhile learning, within their
  local contexts first, then globally. This focus will ensure a
  system of education that encourages ni-Vanuatu students,
  rather than one that rejects them and pushes them out as
  “failures”.

**Concluding remarks**

The need for a clear vision of what we want out of our education system
cannot be overstated. A vision of education, with good goals is very
important. A clear vision of education will direct all other considerations
of relevance, ownership, participation, achievement, quality, resources,
and sustainability.

Developing a clear vision for Vanuatu education is not a task only
for educators or politicians on their own. While politicians must be
convinced so that political leadership is ensured, the participation of local
communities is critical, if ownership is to be obtained. Considerations
of a vision for Vanuatu education must also take into account financial
implications as well as social impacts on individuals and communities.
Moreover, it must be clearly acknowledged that Vanuatu is not to isolate itself from the modern world and global considerations must be allowed to inform Vanuatu’s educational endeavours.

References

This paper provides a personal perspective on the issues for Pacific education in the New Zealand context. Lack of educational success for Pacific learners is something that successive governments have tried to address. The importance of addressing this issue continues to grow in a context of increasing Pacific populations and its implications for education and the future workforce. Educational initiatives have included both mainstream and targeted focus in the areas of early childhood through to tertiary education. In the tertiary sector, Skill New Zealand — Pūkenga Aotearoa, a crown agency with responsibility for Foundation and Vocational education, the issues for Pacific people have been addressed in several ways. This paper outlines some of the effective interventions for Pacific learners. These interventions demonstrate some success for Pacific people in education.

Background

In thinking about the issues and challenges for Pacific education, I draw from my experience within the New Zealand education context, in which I have been involved for over 10 years. I should first explain the use of the term “Pacific people”. In New Zealand, it is the descriptor for those ethnic groups with South Pacific origins. The term is used for policy convenience and generalisation; everywhere else we exist and are acknowledged as Fijian, Tongan, Samoan and so on.

An interesting aspect of the Pacific population is the make-up of the New Zealand-based population and the “home”-based settlement. Cook Islanders, Niueans, and Tokelauans have more people in New Zealand than in their own island countries (see Table 1).
Table 1: Pacific people by ethnicity in New Zealand and estimated 1997 “home” island population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1996 Census</th>
<th>“Home” Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>101,754</td>
<td>171,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>47,019</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongan</td>
<td>31,389</td>
<td>97,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niuean</td>
<td>18,474</td>
<td>2,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>7,895</td>
<td>796,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokelauan</td>
<td>4,917</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Pacific population living in New Zealand</td>
<td>202,233</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1996 Census, ESCAP 1998 Yearbook

This situation presents many interesting tensions and challenges, especially for planning and provision. In education, for example, should the emphasis be on the minority but island-based population or on the majority of the population who, in turn, are a minority of the New Zealand population? Some would argue that geographical location is less of an issue than ensuring an effective education system that, while cognisant of location, is addressing the present and future needs of the society. In other words, the degree and types of manifestation may differ, but many of the educational issues are similar.

Some statistics from the 1996 Census: Pacific Peoples in New Zealand are given below.

- Population was 202,233 (5.5% of the total New Zealand population).
- This was an increase of 21% from 1991.
- 57% were born in New Zealand.

The larger Pacific ethnic populations as approximate percentages of New Zealand’s total Pacific population are as follows:

- Samoans — approx. 50%
- Cook Islanders — 23%
- Tongans — 16%
- Niueans — 9%
• Fijians — 4%
• Tokelauans – 2%

Qualifications

Pacific people are twice as likely to leave school without formal qualifications and, at all levels of post-secondary education, they are not as well-qualified. Very few of them have qualifications at the post degree level (see Appendix, Table 1). In general, they are less likely to go on to tertiary education; only 4.5% do so.

Comparing Pacific people born in New Zealand with those born overseas, the qualification achievement at all levels is better for the New Zealand-born, which is not surprisingly (see Appendix, Fig. 1).

Employment

Compared to the total New Zealand population, Pacific people are more likely to be unemployed. In the 1996 Census, for both men and women aged between 15 and 64, the rate of unemployment of Pacific people was approximately double that of the total New Zealand population. While there were more Pacific women in the 30-64 age group in full-time employment compared to women in the total population, there were fewer in the 15-29 age group, and there were significantly fewer Pacific men, in both age groups, in full-time employment than the total New Zealand male population. The data for part-time employment show that, while more Pacific men in the older age group had part-time employment, there were fewer men in the younger age group and fewer women in both age groups in part-time employment. In general, along with Māori, Pacific people have a lower labour market participation rate.

Income

Pacific people are in occupations that are characteristically low-skilled and poorly paid. The largest occupational category is factory workers (see Appendix, Table 2). This has direct correlation to the level of income. In all age groups, Pacific people have a lower median income,
compared to the total New Zealand population. Within the Pacific population, those born in New Zealand appear to be doing significantly better than their overseas-born counterparts (see Appendix, Table 3).

The overall picture of Pacific people in New Zealand, (of education achievement, health status and employment) is not very positive. Pacific people have been migrating to New Zealand since the mid-fifties to take advantage of education and employment opportunities. However, since the 80s and 90s, their enjoyment, participation, and achievement in these areas have steadily declined. The reasons and the consequences are multi-layered and part of what New Zealand society is now trying to deal with. These issues have thrown up several other issues and challenges, as well as several political and policy intervention initiatives. Employment, health, housing, and education are some of the areas where concerns about Pacific people have been raised, mainly in terms of inequities, under-representation, and under-achievement. In the education area, I want to focus on just three issues and challenges: (a) the “failure” phenomenon, (b) identity issues and education, and (c) vision for education.

The Population Structure

Before I discuss these concerns, I want to provide another backdrop for my discussion. You now know what the current Pacific population looks like. Interestingly, the projected profiles for 2051 for both Māori and Pacific people look very similar to the current New Zealand population profile. Some have interpreted this to mean more Pacific people vis-à-vis New Zealand society, while others have taken it as an indication of a stabilising population, more aligned with the adopted environment. However you interpret it, it is likely that the Pacific population of the future is dependent on the gains or losses made by current developments. There is some sense of urgency in trying to address the implications for a future New Zealand society, where Pacific people will make up a significant part of the population. For example, in Auckland, one in every four people in the labour force will be of Pacific descent. The implications for urban planning, workforce development, and skills development are critical considerations for New Zealand as a whole.
The “failure” phenomenon

In an analysis of the 1996 Census information, Len Cook, the Government Statistician concluded, “Pacific people are committed to education as a mechanism for advancement”. The Census indicated that there was a higher overall participation rate in educational activities by Pacific people, in comparison to the total population. Significantly, more Pacific people were involved in full-time study. Of course, this is not exactly surprising, given the youthful nature of the Pacific population.

Nevertheless, in spite of this commitment and participation, Pacific people appear to be unsuccessful in their pursuit of educational goals. The perceptions and the realities show that many Pacific Island students are leaving school, after 13 years, with no formal academic qualifications, low levels of literacy, low levels of numeracy, and fewer employment or educational options. Additionally, compared to the total population, Pacific people are less qualified and most have qualifications only at the basic/foundation levels.

Over the last ten years, several attempts have been made to reverse the continuing trend of academic under-achievement. Recently, this was captured in current government policy to close the gap between the mainstream population’s achievement and Pacific people’s achievement. These attempts appear to have had limited success.

In my view, part of the ineffectiveness in making real progress in reversing the “failure” trend, is the inability to recognise, let alone reconcile, the tensions between state aspirations and individual aspirations. From this flows the lack of capacity of government structures to address Pacific educational needs (whatever these might be) and develop strategies which recognise both state and individual responsibility of the problems and solutions.

The lack of general understanding, awareness, and knowledge of Pacific people further complicates the issue. For example, although Pacific populations have continued to increase by natural growth since the eighties, most perceptions of Pacific people are still tied up with the migrant Pacific Islander notwithstanding the fact that over half the
population are now 1st and 2nd, even 3rd generation New Zealand-born Pacific people, even though many of the cultural guardians, family heads, and community leaders are island-born. The educational implications of this trend have yet to be realised and addressed.

Some issues and implications include language development policy, cultural maintenance and support, literacy provision, and “identity” issues. The 1996 Census showed that Cook Islanders and Fijians had the largest proportion of those who could speak English only. By contrast, Tongans and Samoans had the greater proportion of those who could speak only their native language. This situation poses interesting challenges for educators in providing environments, content, and approaches to facilitate worthwhile learning for all Pacific students.

Identity issues and education

I believe that, in addressing these challenges, we need to deal with the stereotypes and myths associated with Pacific education. Here are three of these myths and the realities.

1. **The Pacific Island migrant is usually associated with language barriers, cultural alienation, and learning difficulties. This, in turn, results in a focus on customer friendly services: interpreters, translations, and remedial education; that is, the strategies and approaches based on assumptions linked to the migrant profile — teaching English as a second language, for example.**

The reality is that a larger proportion of the Pacific population in New Zealand is born there — not in their Pacific Islands of origin. In other words, the proportion of the population that is “migrant” is decreasing. For many of these New Zealand-born Pacific Islanders, English is most likely to be their first language, so language development may not be the issue; many of the “language” problems they face are in fact literacy and numeracy problems. Many lack the basic skills to participate in a highly literate and technological society. Pacific people are the most urbanised group in New Zealand. They are young and will potentially form a significant portion of tomorrow’s workforce. They need education that
provides them with basic skills as a foundation for the future.

2. There is a perception that better opportunities for education exist in the adopted country.

In reality, many of the barriers to education must also be addressed in the New Zealand context. These barriers may include issues of access, choice, and affordability. In some cases, the “culturally-supportive” environments that are taken for granted in their home countries may be lacking in New Zealand, resulting in particular hardships; for example, the differences in school/mainstream and traditional home cultures. Teachers lament the struggle Pacific students face when educational aspirations are in conflict with family obligations, such as having to go to work to support the family and give up studying.

I suspect that this situation is not very different for those living in the Pacific. Currently, much of education aid is focussed on the tertiary sector, which is partly due to the priorities of Pacific governments and partly due to an approach that allows most of the resources to remain in the donor country. The assumption is that basic, primary education is already in place. I suspect that this may not be the reality. Just as in New Zealand, Pacific students may be actively involved in the formal Western-dominated schooling systems, but for many, that participation does not result in the acquisition of a decent basic education (“Jone/Sione still can’t read”).

3. There is a perception of Pacific youth as culturally confused and somewhat displaced from their cultural roots. Those working on this assumption usually push for inclusion of cultural studies in educational initiatives, usually of the “traditional” variety. Approaches include a strong focus on Pacific language and culture, often to the exclusion of modern issues such as urban youth culture.

Most research on this theme, particularly by New Zealand-born Pacific people, indicates that, far from being culturally confused, most Pacific people have a strong sense of their cultural heritage. However, there are issues of “identity” which are linked with differences in perceptions
and expectations of what it means to be Tongan, Samoan, or Niuean. There is a need for further exploration and research into issues relating to identity and its implications for education. There is also a need to encourage the articulation of identity by this generation that is more familiar with the pohutukawa than with the coconut tree.

What education could be doing is to raise awareness that legitimises the Pacific Island identity in the context of New Zealand society. This may mean challenging and re-constructing some traditional strongholds as well as promoting cultural literacy — a concept expounded by Professor Thaman (1998). It is a concept that recognises the dynamics of culture, accommodates change, creates space for differences, and ensures meaningful and successful participation in one’s community.

**Vision for education**

I wonder — will the “one country; one people” (melting-pot approach) vision be easier to realise because of continued assimilation approaches or will Pacific identity still be distinct enough for the “one country, many people” dream (multiculturalism)? Whatever the goal, what will the education objectives and purposes be to support the kind of society that Pacific people can be a part of?

I think that is a major challenge — to articulate a Pacific Education Vision. I believe that, right now, the vision is unclear and predominantly determined and driven by a “catch-up” (deficit) model perpetuated by mainstream education. There is an apparent lack of a cohesive Pacific-defined and Pacific-driven education vision. Perhaps the dialogue at this conference will provide some direction and leadership in this area. I think a Pacific vision of education is a pre-requisite for education that works.

**Effectiveness**

Currently there is one dominant approach to Pacific education: the mainstream approach. This approach encapsulates the notions of “equal

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1 See Our Place in the Sun (2000) Skill New Zealand publication, for poems on identity by New Zealand born Pacific youth.
access, equal opportunity, and equity”. Within this major approach is the provision for targeting those perceived to be “disadvantaged” as a means of addressing issues of social and economic inequities. Most educational statistics of participation and achievement confirm that Pacific people are not doing very well in the current education systems. Rather than examining if the deficits are institutional or structural, it is assumed that initiatives targeting Pacific people (i.e. redressing their deficits or disadvantages) is where the problem as well as the solution lies. Fundamentally, the belief is that all learners should be able to make it in a mainstream educational environment. Obviously this approach works for a small minority of Pacific people — they do succeed in the system. Understanding how and why is as complex as trying to figure out the “failure” phenomenon.

Research on “educational success” has identified several elements that may have an important influence. These elements include: the quality of the teacher and, consequently, the teaching; class size; and student strategies. The first two factors are addressed more often than the third. Recently, however, Homework Support and Study Centres have been established. These are attempts to develop strategies for students, even if the primary drivers were more to do with dealing with socio-economic factors (e.g. over-crowding in the home, lack of study space, limited resources, and lack of appropriate learning environments).

Hattie (1999, p. 14) noted that students:

are not inert recipients and build strategies to deal with the daily grind of the knowledge dump. Achievement is enhanced to the degree that students develop self-strategies: to see and receive feedback to verify rather than enhance their sense of achievement efficacy.

This is the “learning to learn” area, which is still largely unexplored in Pacific education.

Skill New Zealand has implemented various initiatives to re-connect Pacific students to their learning environment in order to ”turn them on to” learning. With Professor Thaman, we have run successful creative writing workshops for Pacific students and tutors. Through these
workshops, participants discover, re-construct, and produce. Many are unaware of their talents to create poetry and are pleasantly surprised by two important things: that they can do it and that they can connect with others. These two things, being valued and being able to succeed, are two critical ingredients for effective Pacific education.

The reasons the current education system fails the majority of Pacific students are also complex and difficult to pinpoint. A lot of the failure has been attributed to family background, student attitudes, and ethnicity, although research has concluded that being poor and black are not synonymous with being a failure. However, more research and more exploration of the issues are still necessary for the purpose of finding answers and for better understanding of the issues.

I would like to turn my attention now to some of the initiatives in Pacific Education implemented by Skill New Zealand (SNZ) in this mainstream context. In New Zealand, more than half the Pacific people participating in tertiary education are in community education and over half of the credits gained by Pacific people are gained with community education providers. That means that, for most Pacific people, the first real taste of tertiary success is gained in a non-mainstream institutional learning environment. This is the part of the tertiary sector that SNZ is involved in.

I want to provide an example of a relatively successful targeted programme and an example of effective policy provision, in terms of academic and employment success for Pacific students. The first example is a programme aimed at providing young Pacific people with a fully-funded educational opportunity, one which facilitates employment or further pursuit of higher learning in areas/fields where Pacific people are traditionally under-represented. The Skill Enhancement Programme targets both Māori and Pacific students. Tupulaga Le Lumana’i is the Pacific Island strand. Some of the features that make it successful are:

- the funded element — scholarships
- validation and formalisation of culture
- Pacific leadership and management, and
- acquisition of skills and qualifications.
The package works because, on the whole, the philosophical aspects are incorporated into the practical requirements; the Pacific student is validated, practically assisted, and provided with the tools required for academic study or employment. There are few opportunities where you can both study and gain employment skills. Usually the focus is either on employment — you work and have limited options for formal study — or else you are studying and have limited options to gain workplace skills and knowledge. In the Tupulaga Le Lumana’i programme, formal study and workplace learning are integrated to provide a foundation that can result in further pathways in either employment or higher tertiary studies.

My second example is the existence of a policy that facilitates the role of Pacific people in the provision of solutions that are a recognition and acceptance that Pacific people can be effectively involved in delivery educational services. SNZ contracts about 400 (out of 600) private training establishments to deliver pre-employment training and education programmes. This group includes about 32 training providers who identify themselves as “Pacific” organisations. (In earlier days, Pacific people were encouraged to become training providers and funding was made available for this purpose.) These organisations see themselves as reflective of the Pacific Island communities they serve. They claim to run organisations that reflect a Pacific culture (most of the organisations are Samoan). They claim to use, validate, and promote Pacific ways, such as the use of a family (community) concept in the provision of a learning environment, where the values of sharing, respect, and alofa, are demonstrated.

We know that the existence of Pacific organisations is contributing in some way to the overall success of Pacific students. We know this anecdotally and we know from the statistics quoted earlier that many Pacific people are experiencing tertiary education and success through the provision of community-based organisations.

Vital Statistics

In our three main programmes: Training Opportunities (for those 18 years plus), Youth Training (16-17 year olds), and Skill Enhancement
(16-25 year olds), 10-16% of students have always been Pacific people (see Table 2).

Table 2: Vital Statistics: March 2001 Participation in Skill New Zealand programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Opportunities:</th>
<th>Total trainees 8,099</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islands</td>
<td>11% (891)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>42% (3,401)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Training:</td>
<td>Total trainees 5,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islands</td>
<td>10% (529)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>50% (2,641)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill Enhancement:</td>
<td>Total trainees 657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islands</td>
<td>16% (105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>84% (552)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Training:</td>
<td>Total trainees 62,857 (at Dec 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islands</td>
<td>5% (3,143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>17% (10,685)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Skill New Zealand

When the total picture of tertiary representation is considered, compared with the rest of the population Pacific people, along with Māori, appear to be over-represented in the area of tertiary education where basic skills and qualification acquisition are predominant, equating to studies at Fifth form level. Comparatively more Pākehā are involved in university studies and few are involved in “community education” — the picture is reversed for Pacific and Māori people. In a paradigm where academic education means university education, any other education (even when essential to the targeted beneficiaries) is seen as incomplete, or of lower status. Skill NZ holds university education as an ideal but recognizes that the steps to achieve it may be incremental; it is a long and winding road.

This over-representation of Pacific peoples in what is essentially
“second chance” education tends to be viewed negatively. For me, it reflects the reality of the need for basic education and for now, provides one of the best options that Pacific people have to achieve in tertiary education and secure employment in areas beyond the factory floor.

After completing the Youth Training programme, Pacific people are achieving “further education outcomes” — that is, moving on to polytechnic and university studies or other SNZ courses, at levels on a par with the other groups but, together with Māori, they are moving on to full-time employment at a significantly lower rate than the Pākehā group (see Appendix, Fig. 2). After completing the Training Opportunities programme, Pacific people are gaining employment outcomes at a similar rate to the Pākehā group (see Appendix Fig. 3).

Many Pacific people use these opportunities to gain access to higher levels of learning and find employment in non-traditional occupations. For example, many Pacific people are undertaking courses in:
- Business Management and Computing
- Retail Sales and Marketing
- Tourism and Hospitality
- Real Estate.

In contrast, most Pacific people enrolled in the mainstream tertiary institutions are concentrated in the humanities.

Recommendations

The consideration of what is Pacific Education, what it is doing for our people and what it could be doing for them is timely. I believe that thinking about how we provide is as important as thinking about what we provide and why we provide. My recommendations are based around these three themes.

**How** Mainstream provisions are not enough; we need alternatives and choices. We need to look beyond the traditional venues. The Skill New Zealand experience shows that community involvement as well as mainstream input can lead to educational success. In this context, we also need to consider **where**. In New Zealand, we assume that we have
basic education because it is free and relatively accessible, but this is not necessarily the case, as the poor levels of literacy and numeracy among Pacific people show. I suggest also that the same can be said for Pacific peoples outside New Zealand. Perhaps this needs to be reflected in funding — an emphasis on foundation education rather than the current push for more tertiary (university) education.

**What** Pacific solutions also have a place — let us articulate and support indigenous notions of education in the modern context. These solutions need to take into account the dynamics of ethnic culture as well as present and future needs.

**Why** We need a vision — to determine the why or what for so that we can construct goals and strategies to realise this vision. We need a clearly articulated expectation of quality, standards, and accountability so that we can monitor the goals and be proactive in the educational initiatives that affect us.

**Conclusion**

I have focussed my presentation mainly on the policy context and provision for Pacific education in New Zealand. I am, however, mindful that the philosophies, values, and theories of education, whether Western or indigenous, are powerful influences on how we think and act. If the mandate of education is to “provide quality human resources in order to achieve its country’s developmental goals”, as stated in the background paper for this conference, then the link between what we think, especially from Pacific perspectives, and what is done, is a critical starting place. Who better to do this exploration than those who, as well as being “Pacific”, have demonstrated personal success in education? There is a proverb that says: “When lost, it is better to return to a familiar point before rushing on.”

**References**


Cook, L. (2000). *Looking past the 20th Century: a selection of long-


**Appendix**

**Table 1**: Highest educational qualification attained as percentage of population, aged 15 years and over – Pacific and total New Zealand populations, 1996 Census.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest qualification level</th>
<th>Pacific</th>
<th>Total New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total for each sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher degree</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced vocational qualification</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate vocational qualification</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled vocational qualification</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic vocational qualification</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** Occupation Groups for Pacific people and New Zealand total, 1996 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Pacific</th>
<th>Total New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand-born</td>
<td>Overseas-born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>13,800</td>
<td>9,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>21,300</td>
<td>14,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>22,400</td>
<td>17,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>19,900</td>
<td>16,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>12,800</td>
<td>10,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>10,800</td>
<td>8,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3:** Meridian personal income ($) of Pacific people by age group, 1996 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Pacific</th>
<th>Total New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand-born</td>
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<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>1,800</td>
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<td>13,800</td>
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<td>25-34</td>
<td>21,300</td>
<td>14,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>22,400</td>
<td>17,100</td>
</tr>
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<td>45-54</td>
<td>19,900</td>
<td>16,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>12,800</td>
<td>10,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>10,800</td>
<td>8,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 1:** Highest educational qualification by New Zealand-born and overseas-born Pacific Islands population, aged 15 years and over, 1996 Census.

**Fig. 2:** Dec 1999-Nov 2000 Outcomes, Youth Training. Labour market results by ethnicity. Skill New Zealand
Fig. 3: Dec 1999-Nov 2000 Outcomes. Training Opportunities. Labour market results by ethnicity. Skill New Zealand
CHAPTER 17

Personal Reflections on Developments in Māori Education: 1970-2001

Wally Penetito

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Background

I have been asked to present you with a personal interpretation of developments in Māori education over the past few years. I have chosen to reflect on the last 30 years.

I began teaching in a small-town New Zealand school in 1960. At that time, the government of the day was saying “we need more Māori teachers”. I had been at Ardmore Teachers’ Training College for two years, the norm at that time, and was paid for being there, a policy of the 1960s to attract people into teaching. A Māori quota operated then, and I could well have been one of the group who came into College under that policy although it is unlikely since I already had the pre-requisite qualifications. There was another group of Māori students who were older than most of us who we learned were mainly Returned Servicemen who had served in Malaya; they were called “T Section” and had a one-year training course which was probably the fore-runner of the RPL Policy (Recognition of Prior Learning) which was to become a part of equity policies in the years ahead.

It is strange to look back at 40 years of service in education and still hear that tired old plea, “We need more Māori teachers”. I have often asked myself why the education system keeps saying it needs more Māori teachers. What differences have Māori teachers made? In what way is the education system reflecting the Māori teachers that are already in it? Are Māori students performing any better as a consequence of

1The word Māori retains the same form whether referring to the people or the language, and is used to signal singular and plural
being taught by Māori teachers? Is there less ignorance among Pākehā students and teachers about “things Māori” as a result of at least some contact with Māori teachers? How much Māori content is there in the curriculum and how much of that knowledge is central to the definition of being Māori? Are we able to say that pedagogy, assessment, evaluation, management, governance, or things like school architecture and building designs have been informed by the ongoing association with Māori teachers?

Sadly, the answers to all these questions is no, or at best, very little. Māori teachers have had only slightly more influence on education in New Zealand than you have had in changing the shape of Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa. There are some signs of hope, however. Slight, but radical, changes have been occurring in Māori education since the 1970s. Māori teachers, as a cohort, have been involved in these changes but they have not been the critical factor. When the system wanted more Māori teachers, Māori community people said they wanted more say about the sort of education that was important to them. When the system wanted to focus on school achievement, Māori spokespeople said the priority needed to be the revitalisation of their language. When the system sought increased participation, Māori demanded greater control over their Māori knowledge. When the system demanded higher standards of teacher education, Māori reacted by becoming providers themselves and establishing their own Māori teacher education courses. When the system was legislating to increase its responsiveness to Māori, Māori set about establishing an alternative system.

Since the 1970s, the critical change factor for Māori educational development has come, in the main, from outside the official sectors. Māori community groups are likely to be more remote from mainstream activities and also more likely to be part of the less well-off faction of society and, therefore, more likely to be pursuing transformative strategies for their goals. The changes that occurred throughout the 1970s did not happen in any conscious, deliberate, planned way, although they were not haphazard either. There has been no shortage of official reports over this period. I have at least 40 in my own files including Māori Children and the Teacher (Department of Education,

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²The Māori name for the Pacific Ocean
1971), He Huarahi (NACME, 1980), and Issues and Factors Relating to Māori Achievement (Hirsh, 1990), but very few have come from the communities. In the last decade or so, this situation has begun to change, with an intermittent supply of Iwi Education Plans (those plans that are tribe specific) coming into circulation. The point I want to make is that, even when Māori accepted that teachers were important for the educational advancement of their children, some other things were at least as important if not more so: the curriculum, the assessment and evaluation of inputs and outcomes, the way schools are organised and managed, the resources that children use, relations between schools and communities, and governance issues, to name but a few areas of that hectic little world. Yet the call for special attention by Māori for any of these areas comes nowhere near matching the sustained mantra of “we need more Māori teachers”. Strange indeed.

I will discuss briefly, each decade from 1970, what I believe to be the more generative of these “radical” changes and then conclude with an up-to-date evaluation of the state of Māori education.

**A Summary of key developments in Māori education**

**1970s: Struggling for survival in the system**

Sir Apirana Ngata’s famous aphorism begins with these words addressed to a child: *E tipu e rea mo ngā rā o tō ao*. They translate as: Grow up tender shoot in the days of your world. They are wise words. The words are neither utopian about the past nor about the future but, as with all children throughout time, preoccupied with the present. And it is in the present, no matter what decade, that Māori young people have struggled to find a place in their world, and their whanau (extended family) have struggled with them.

The first key development, then, is problematic; how does a politically dominated indigenous group accommodate educationally with a colonial power without losing to a considerable degree its own integrity, its own autonomy or, in the case of the Māori, their own *tino rangatiratanga* (absolute authority)? The other side of this coin is the question, what does a politically dominant power lose by ensuring the
cultural continuity through education of its indigenous population? The positive angle on this same question is: what can a politically dominant power gain by supporting the cultural continuity, through education, of its indigenous population? Of the three questions the first warns about a kind of “subtractive” biculturalism (Māori identity is threatened), the third postulates a kind of “additive” biculturalism (Pākehā identity is supported and enhanced), while the answer to the second question is that the dominant power has nothing to lose (the status quo is maintained).³

A system of education existed among Māori for centuries before Pākehā arrived on the scene. This was manifest in various kinds of whare (repository) like whare maire for tribal histories, whare kura for knowledge of kaitiaki or guardians, whare porukuruku for solitary learning and, the best known of them all, whare wānanga for esoteric knowledge. This heritage of the systematic pursuit of knowledge was easily accommodated with the introduction of new forms of knowledge from the Settler Society.

The history of the Māori in the nineteenth century is filled with the accommodation of diverse new knowledge, some of it coherent with a Māori ontology and much of it deeply contradictory. Māori saw the benefits in institutionalising learning and many village schools of learning — outside those sponsored by Missionaries — came into existence before the Land Wars of the 1860s. Learning to read was very popular among the villagers; it was reported that in the mid-1800s there were more literate Māori in New Zealand than Pākehā. Agriculture and shipping also went through a period of boom among Māori in the 1880s.

The point I want to make is that Māori have always understood the importance of education as a way to enhance oneself materially and culturally, as well as symbolically. In the words of the famous French sociologist/philosopher/educationist, Emile Durkheim, “education is the most powerful instrument a society possesses for fashioning its members in its own image” (1977, p. xii). Education in New Zealand, however, has not been concerned with fashioning Māori in the Māori image, but with fashioning all its members in the image of the Pākehā and Pākehā society. There is an unbroken line of this practice from the

³ Additive and substractive biculturalism is borrowed from Triandis (1976)
Native Schools Act 1867 to the demise of Māori Schools in 1969.

**1980s: Politicisation and the creation of an infra-structure**

Māori, as with most working class people and most indigenous people throughout the world, grew up with the belief that education was the path toward a better life. They took a long time to realise that schooling, as it was practised, was not the same thing as education and would not necessarily lead to a better life. The appeal from Ngata: *Ko tō ringa ki ngā rākau a to Pākehā hei ara mo tō tinana* (Put your hand to the skills of the Pākehā for your material well-being) proved to be extremely elusive. The acquisition of Pākehā skills was being achieved by many Māori, but the price for most was too high. In the words of The Waitangi Tribunal (1986, p. 46):

> Judged by the system’s own standards Māori children are not being successfully taught, and for this reason alone apart from the duty to protect the Māori language, the education system is being operated in breach of the Treaty [of Waitangi].

Even without reference to the Treaty of Waitangi, it was obvious that the education system was failing most Māori. Statistical evidence was showing an achievement gap long before the 1980s and now there was anecdotal evidence that could not be ignored, thanks to the Waitangi Tribunal process. What was surprising to those who habitually looked to the system to respond was that piecemeal interventions continued as they had always done. There was still no urgency. Māori communities were to change in a way that was reminiscent of the period of literacy in the early and mid-1800s but the fruits of those changes were not to be reaped until the 1990s.

In the meantime, an important lesson Māori gained from the Pākehā *rākau*[^4] was the need to build an “infra-structure”, a network of structures to support future developments, which would also serve to “politicise” the Māori population who, it was already seen, were keen to challenge

[^4]: Rākau is taken from Ngata’s poem and refers to skills, attributes, accomplishments that derive from the Pākehā world.
the excesses of Pākehā power in education. In 1980, The National Advisory Committee on Māori Education (NACME) published its second major report, “He Huarahi”. That report had considerable influence in future developments in Māori education by pushing out in 5 integrated strands:

- the place of Māori language in the education of Māori and non-Māori
- early childhood education and care
- quality of teachers — recruitment and training
- schools better suited to Māori needs, and
- continuing and second-chance education.

The number of bilingual schools burgeoned from 5 in 1980 to 20 in 1990; Taha Māori programmes were introduced into mainstream schools in 1984; the kaiarahi reo (language assistants) scheme began in 1985 with 35 assistants and reached 75 by 1987; the itinerant teachers of Māori, introduced in 1976, numbered 55 by 1990; and the Māori Advisory Service, introduced in the mid-1970s, employed about 40 personnel by the end of the 1980s. In the period 1976 to 1980, the Department of Education ran 17 marae-based (Māori traditional institutional base) in-service courses. “The experience of marae life was intended to bring about an awareness of the feelings of a people of a minority culture when they were exposed to and involved with a different majority culture” (Department of Education, 1982).

There is no doubt in my mind that a process of “politicization” was slowly taking place over this decade: a process of informed struggling with decision-makers, envisaging alternatives to the way things were, gaining greater capacity to act independently and “have a go” for oneself, and understanding how to get necessary resources. During this period, a discourse developed, which marked a shift away from debates over the supply of teachers, the content of the curriculum, the nature of parental support, educational leadership, and other well-worn topics and towards discussions around factors such as questions of power, issues of conflict, questions of boundary maintenance, questions about what counts as knowledge, and other concerns like identity protection. Such concerns cannot be answered adequately without an explicit theory of schooling or of education or of development. The struggle for
tino rangatiratanga had to be fought every inch of the way, but in 1982 kohanga reo came into existence and had a profound effect on the rest of that decade, substantial enough to reverberate across the education system into the 21st century.

1990s: The rise and rise of kaupapa Māori education

Ngata had to wait several generations for the third part of his “prophecy” to bear fruit; Ko tō ngākau ki nga tāonga a ō tūpuna Māori hei tikitiki mo tō māhuna (Give your heart to the treasures of your Māori forebears as an adornment for your head).

The “true” agenda for Māori education began to emerge during the 1990s. At the heart of the agenda was immersion Māori language and the embedding in education of a Māori philosophy. Te Kōhanga Reo (Language Nests) came into existence in 1982 as the result of a National Māori Conference. Te Kōhanga Reo (TKR) spread throughout Māori-dom like a bush fire. It was an initiative geared to promote the Māori language and values among the whānau (extended family) by focusing on mokopuna (grandchildren) and te reo Māori (Māori language) acquisition. Approximately 12,000 children are currently enrolled in TKR. The initiative now has international acclaim.

After TKR, came the primary schools, Kura Kaupapa Māori (KKM), which brought an extension of immersion Māori language into the institution of primary schooling. In KKM, the language of communication and instruction in every aspect of primary school life is te reo Māori. The first of these schools opened in 1985 and was outside the legal framework of what constituted a school in New Zealand. Now, in 2001, there are 74 KKM and of these 9 are wharekura; that is, they offer secondary education. There are also 3 wānanga which are officially recognised Māori tertiary educational institutions.

KKM has its educational philosophy, entitled Te Aho Matua, protected in legislation, while each of the three sectors has its own national governance body. TKR has the TKR National Trust, KKM has Te Rūnanga-nui o ngā KKM, and Wānanga has Te Tauihu.
At the same time as these developments were occurring, the mainstream system was forced to speed-up the process of meeting Māori demands within the existing system where the majority of Māori students remain. These are some of the activities that either came into being or were accelerated through this period.

- Māori medium education was promoted across KKM, bilingual schools, schools with immersion classes, and schools with bilingual classes.
- The development of a Māori Language Strategy and a Māori Language Education Plan promised a systematic rejuvenation of the indigenous language of New Zealand.
- Māori Curriculum Statements like Pāngarau (mathematics), Pūtaiao (science), Hangarau (technology), Te Reo Māori (Māori language), Tikanga-a-Iwi (social studies), and Ngā Toi (the arts) were developed.
- The development of Māori medium learning materials multiplied, albeit extremely slowly.
- Māori medium assessment measures were developed, and
- An investigation around the notion of increased Māori education authority slowly emerged with the government sponsoring a National Māori Education Summit this year to explore the possibilities. They have yet to report.

The period was marked with frantic development in the whole of Māori education and only the last point mentioned above, along with developments in the tertiary sector, remained relatively static.

2000s: What is Māori about Māori education?

The final line of Ngata’s aphorism, ko tō wairua ki tō Atua nāna nei ngā mea katoa (And your spirit give to your God, the source of all things) is probably the “real crunch” issue for future developments in Māori education. It is the “spiritual” dimension of Māoritanga that sets it aside from Pākehātanga that is the real dilemma the system will face this decade. Kaupapa Māori learning institutions are already heavily immersed in the promulgation of taha wairua (the spiritual dimension) but the vast majority of Māori students are in mainstream schools (some estimates make this in the vicinity of at least 85%).
think there is an educational solution to the dilemma of accounting for “spirituality” in a system which is legally “secular” and it comes from a broad understanding of the nature of spirituality. The Māori term wairuatanga is a much closer encapsulation of the idea. An adaptation of a quote from the Canadian academic, Verna Kirkness (1992, p. 34), makes wairuatanga clear from an educational point of view:

Unless a child learns about the forces which shape her: the history of her people, their values and customs, their language, she will never really know herself or her potential as a human being. Māori culture and values have a unique place in the history of mankind. The Māori child who learns about her heritage will be proud of it. The lessons she learns in school, her whole school experience, should reinforce and contribute to the image she has of herself as a Māori.

Not only should all these matters be taught in schools, they should be taught as part of the core curriculum to all New Zealanders. They make up the uniqueness of this land and its peoples. They provide the sense of authenticity in a world which is blandly becoming branded by McDonalds food products, Levi jeans, and Nike shoes all in the name of globalisation. Every person’s definition of their place in the world is about the spiritual nature of existence as well as its material nature.

For the first time we will witness the measuring of performance and developments in Māori education in its own terms using its own criteria, something the existing education system has been historically loath to do. We will get some of it wrong but at least they will be our mistakes and, if learning from one’s mistakes is as important as we are made to believe, then we will learn a lot.

Most of the developments up to now have been reinforced within frameworks which emerged within the context of unequal Māori -Pākehā relationships developed over the last 200 years. Pākehā norms by themselves will no longer prevail in the taken-for-granted starting position they have enjoyed up to now. Why is this likely to be the case? Because Māori are now in a political position where they are prepared
to push for alternative structures and make them succeed. They have learned how to struggle with the juggernaut of “we are one people”, “we know best what is in your real interests”, and “one size fits all”.

Māori are poised to establish their own “education authority” or “education authorities”. There is a growing desire to influence the education system in every sector in terms of “local Māori core knowledge”. There is a realisation that Māori communities are subjected to piecemeal approaches from several independent government departments, each one of which quite often does not know what the others are doing, have done, or are planning to do. Those communities are learning to demand coherent action from all agencies.

These are the beginnings of a true “partnership” as envisaged by Māori in the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. The educational principles for these developments arise out of a set of “critical questions” posed by Smith (1993) in a research conference paper:

- *He aha ngā taumata o te mātauranga Māori?* (What counts as Māori education?)
- *Me pewhea te whakaako i enei?* (How should it be taught?)
- *Mo ehea roopu enei Matauranga Māori?* (Who should the courses be aimed at?)
- *Ma wai e ki te tika enei Mātauranga Māori, a, ko wai te kai-tiaki o enei Mātauranga Māori?* (Who controls the validity and legitimacy of what counts as Māori education?)
- *Ko wai ka hua; ko wai ka tohu?* (Whose interests are at stake?)
- *He aha te whai-wāhi o te ao o te Māori i tēenei ra ki runga i nga patai o te Mātauranga Māori?* (How much of all these things are influenced by the position of Māori in today’s society?)

**Māori education at the cross-roads**

I have summarised changes in Māori education over the last 30 years in a broad “theory of development” which began where it had virtually started a hundred years before as struggling to survive in a system of
domination which had its origins in Britain and Europe. The 1980s was summarised as a busy period of organised resistance, politicization, and the creation of an infra-structure which would provide the sort of structural support the next decade would find invaluable. The 1990s saw the rise of Kaupapa Māori education across a much broader expanse of the system than schools alone. Kaupapa Māori education was here to stay and the only question now was: Where next? The summary brings us up to the 21st Century with the crucial question: What is Māori about Māori education? I answer this question by stating four evaluative principles for present and future developments.

Māori education is an education which:

• embraces the past, acts on the present, and plans for the future
• makes tangatawhenua (the indigenous Māori population) knowledge, values, and institutions valid so that these become a central part of what it means to be educated in Aotearoa, New Zealand
• facilitates Māori communities making decisions in their own best interests, and
• acknowledges at least two ways of knowing, doing, and being: one Western/Pākehā and the other Māori.

This ancient proverb is at the heart of these developments: Whāia te iti kahurangi, ki to tūoho koe me he maunga teitei. (Pursue that which is precious, and do not be deterred by anything less than a lofty mountain).

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CHAPTER 18

Pacific Education in Aotearoa

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Introduction

I was born in Samoa and migrated to New Zealand with my parents and three other siblings at the age of five. All my formal education has been in the New Zealand system, and I have taught in the secondary school system for over 17 years, seven of which have been in a senior management role. I presently work as an independent education consultant. My contribution to this publication is very much a narrative of my views on Pacific Education in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Main issues and challenges in Pacific Education today

Current trends show that the Pacific population in New Zealand is growing 11 times faster than other population groups and is expected to double by 2031. The 1996 Census recorded that about 6% of the total population identified as Pacific. The Pacific population was considerably younger in age structure than the total New Zealand population with 39.2% of Pacific peoples under 15 years of age, compared with 23% of the total population. However, only 3% of Pacific peoples were 65 years of age or over at the same time, the corresponding figure for the total population being 11.7%. ¹

The rapid population increase that is expected makes it a matter of urgency to ensure that the educational needs of Pacific children are met across all three educational sectors; early childhood, compulsory, and tertiary education.² Meeting the educational needs of Pacific children in the New Zealand education sector is an urgent requirement as they are currently over-represented in the poor education performance indicators.

¹Statistics NZ, Pacific Islands population, http://www.stats.govt.nz
This is a challenge that is often expressed loudly in public forums by politicians and officials. Despite efforts to target more funding through specially developed projects by the Ministry of Education, the trends for Pacific peoples in education continue in much the same way with very little effective positive change.

The main issue for New Zealand and Pacific education is that of continuing inadequate academic achievement rates for Pacific students. In 1999, 28% of Pacific students leaving compulsory education had no formal qualifications. These statistics are reflected in the low number of Pacific peoples who participate in tertiary education. In 1999 only four percent of all Tertiary Education Institute students were Pacific students and yet they represent about seven percent of the total New Zealand population.

The government is well aware of the implications of such statistics and has taken the lead in not only drawing attention to them, but also setting targets for different government departments to achieve. The areas which are being addressed through an injection of funding and project development from the Ministry of Education include:

- early childhood education
- teacher supply
- extra resourcing for schools which have large numbers of Pacific students
- identification of barriers to participation in tertiary education
- school governance, bilingual education, and
- professional development programmes in the compulsory education sector.

Is Pacific Education effectively addressing these issues and challenges?

Pacific students have been over-represented in the lower half educational achievement statistics in New Zealand for a long time. Despite efforts to address this, no real change has occurred in the past five years. The trends remain the same. Pacific communities have welcomed the

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3 Ministry of Education, Data and Management
4 Ministry of Education, Data and Management school statistics
attention being drawn to this situation by the government since the last general election in 1999, but the results of this concentrated effort have yet to be seen. Poor academic performance for a large and growing proportion of the student population should affect all social policy development.

Low participation rates in early childhood education of Pacific preschoolers have been the focus of many Ministry of Education policies and programmes. Many teachers of primary school entrants claim that Pacific students starting compulsory education at the age of five lack the skills necessary to give them a good start and are at a disadvantage immediately. It would seem that the effect of this poor start continues throughout the 13 years that most Pacific students are at school, as shown in the school leavers’ statistics discussed above.

Pacific parents and families are being encouraged to enrol their preschool aged children in early childhood education centres. There is continuing support by the government for the growth and ongoing development of Pacific early childhood centres. The need to increase the number of Pacific children participating in early childhood education, however, should not diminish the responsibility that teachers have in the compulsory sector to minimise the effects of transition that can occur as children move to a primary school setting, and to do all they can to ensure that these children are learning to their potential. Teachers should not use the excuse that these children enter compulsory education with fewer English language skills than their peers to set low expectations for Pacific children.

The issue of teacher expectations of Pacific students, and differences between school and home values are two areas that are difficult to isolate and effectively address. The Ministry of Education has established and developed a lot of programmes and projects in the desire to improve educational outcomes for Pacific students within the compulsory education sector. It is my belief that the effect of such investment is limited until the issues of teacher expectations and the mismatch between school and home values are addressed and resolved. Teacher expectations set a ceiling for student achievement. It has been my experience that teachers underestimate the influence that their day-to-
day interaction with Pacific students has on their achievement. Pacific students are particularly sensitive to their teachers’ desire for them to achieve. They recognise when expressions of high expectations do not match the teaching strategies used by teachers. For example, teachers may consistently use a context unfamiliar to the student without regard to the importance of a familiar context in enabling students to “make sense” of the programme of study, or the “throw away” sarcastic comments made to ease a situation but which have the effect of “shaming” the student. Some teacher behaviour and school policies and structures obstruct or deny Pacific students the right to achieve at a level for which they have the potential.

There is a shortage of Pacific teachers in the compulsory education sector. Presently, only about two per cent of all teachers are Pacific and yet Pacific children make up seven percent of the student population. The teacher supply strategy is an attempt to address this variance with the availability of scholarships for Pacific peoples to commence a teaching training course. The programme of professional development for Pacific teachers is aimed at supporting them to remain within the teaching profession as well as seeking promotion that would increase their ability to influence decision-making at the school management level. The increase in the number of Pacific teachers and their ability to influence decision-making should help to narrow the gap between school and home values. Other Ministry of Education programmes such as the Pacific Island School Community Liaison Project and Home School Partnerships are attempts to establish and develop a meaningful and useful relationship between schools and their Pacific communities.

Pacific language bilingual units have been established in many Auckland schools, particularly in South Auckland. Pacific teachers and parents have lobbied school boards to establish these units in the desire to improve learning outcomes for students. The development of a national educational policy to standardise these practices and give direction to the development of bilingual education has been slow. For some Pacific nations like Niue and the Cook Islands, the survival of their language will be influenced by this policy and its implementation in the school system.
Pacific peoples do not participate in tertiary education at a rate comparable to the total population. This is not surprising given that a significant number of Pacific students leave the compulsory education sector with no, or inadequate, qualifications to enter tertiary education. Research funded by the Ministry of Education to identify barriers to access and to find solutions to participation and achievement for Pacific peoples in tertiary education is presently being carried out. The target is that, by 2006, six per cent of tertiary enrolments and graduates will be Pacific students.

Policies that require schools and educational institutions to give an account of how the needs of Pacific students are being addressed and the outcomes of these strategies would help to ensure that Pacific education becomes part of their core business. Tertiary educational institutions are required to report on strategies that have been put in place to improve retention and achievement of Pacific students. Progress for the success of these strategies is reported to the Ministry of Education and funding for student numbers will be reduced if requirements necessary to address Pacific student retention and achievement are not achieved. These institutions will also need to include a statement in their charter which acknowledges their commitment to Pacific education.

**Recommendations**

Improving Pacific student achievement rates has proven to be an elusive outcome, despite the rhetoric and resourcing that it has been afforded over recent years. Student population projections, particularly for Auckland, the most populated region of New Zealand, add urgency to the need to address these inequitable outcomes for Pacific peoples. The social and economical implications for New Zealand if this issue is not addressed adequately cannot be overstated.

These recommendations are made in the light of the above discussion and stem mainly from my own knowledge and experiences gained from working in New Zealand and Samoan secondary schools; as a teacher, senior manager, and education consultant.

- Pre-service teacher training needs to more effectively equip
future teachers with knowledge and skills to address the learning needs of Pacific students: provision of programmes for the teaching of Pacific languages in the compulsory education sector, provision of programmes which include pedagogy consistent with the values of Pacific peoples.

- Policies that require schools and tertiary education institutions to be accountable for meeting set targets to raise the achievement levels of Pacific students should be enforced. Those institutions that make a difference should be rewarded and those that do not achieve the benchmarks should be sanctioned.

- The policy for Pacific bilingual education needs to be developed with some urgency and its implementation funded adequately. This would assist schools and teachers to develop programmes that address both English and Pacific language acquisition and development. The present situation whereby Pacific bilingual units are developed with little knowledge of their effect on student learning and poor resource allocation has meant that they are sometimes used as a means to manage the behaviour of students that non-Pacific teachers are unable to handle.

- Professional development for Pacific teachers and teachers of Pacific students are an important component of in-service training. Pacific teachers struggle to manage the many responsibilities they take on, particularly when they are the sole Pacific teacher in the school. Networking and being able to make contact with other Pacific teachers to share concerns and build self-confidence are important outcomes as part of a strategy to increase the number of Pacific teachers in the teaching profession.

**Conclusion**

Improving educational outcomes for Pacific students in New Zealand schools has been the focus for Pacific education. One cannot ignore the fact that educational outcomes are greatly influenced by socio-economical factors. Pacific families are more likely than other groups to have a low economic standard of living. The impact of low incomes
on the economic standard of living is reflected in indicators such as housing, health, and access to information communication technology\textsuperscript{5}. So, while resources are directed into policies and programmes at the different education sectors, one cannot ignore the influence that economics has on Pacific educational outcomes. It would therefore make good sense to ensure that the strategy to address this is one that is integrated and addresses all areas of social, economic, and educational policy development and implementation.

\textsuperscript{4} Ministry of Education, Data and Management school statistics
Recommendations

The Vision of Education, symbolised by the “Tree of Opportunity” is about survival, transformation, and sustainability and its success is measured in terms of performance and appropriate behaviour in a particular context. As practical steps to achieving this vision, the Colloquium recommends that:

Short-term

National

1. Existing formal educational services (primary education, the first 6 years of formal schooling) be consolidated by upgrading and improving the factors, structures, and processes that impact on educational performance and outcomes. This is to be done by embedding and integrating Pacific values, beliefs, knowledge systems, skills, attitudes, and behaviours in these existing elements:

   - legislation and policies, including language policies
   - curriculum, pedagogies
   - teacher education and training
   - assessment and evaluation
   - management and administration
   - resourcing of education.

These could be addressed almost immediately; in some places, they are already being addressed.

2. Awareness campaigns be developed, targeting the public, politicians, policy-makers, and communities on the need to develop a national vision which should inform both development and educational reforms. All stakeholders must be involved in the process.

This meeting is an important first step.
Regional

3. An inventory of human and institutional capacities on the indigenising of Pacific education be established.
4. A network of key educators and institutions be established to support and facilitate national and regional developments arising from this initiative.
5. Leadership and advocacy be provided for this initiative with politicians, senior policy-makers, and donors.

Long-term

National

6. A national vision, which would inform a national vision for education, be debated and defined.
7. A vision for education and its implications for educational practice based on the national vision be discussed and defined with stakeholders, particularly local communities.
8. The proposed model be used as a basis for vision building, dialogue, discussion, and debate on education.
9. Strategies and plans be developed to reflect the vision at each level and in different programmes (teacher education, curriculum development, etc.).
10. Caretakers of indigenous knowledge be mobilised, and their support and contributions recruited.
11. Trial case studies with selected local communities be administered and used for on-going development.

Regional

12. Political commitment to the concept of “Tree of Opportunity” be ensured, as well as the need for indigenisation of education in the Pacific.
13. A Research Centre for Pacific Education attached to IOE, USP be established.
14. A network be developed of existing Research Institutes, such as the Tonga Institute of Education, University of Hawai’i, PREL,
University of Guam, The University of Goroka, The University of Auckland, Victoria University of Wellington, The University of the South Pacific, National University of Samoa, Solomon Islands National University, and other national institutes of the USP region in Vanuatu, Marshall Islands, Cook Islands, Niue, Kiribati, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Nauru, and national institutions in the French and former US territories of the Pacific. Such a network could be coordinated by IOE, USP. Their mandate would be Research, Data Collection, and Dissemination. Their individual roles are to encourage:

i. Pacific research at both informal and formal education levels
ii. the establishment and support of Pacific research institutes where they do not already exist
iii. the establishment of publishing houses for Pacific writers
iv. training in research methodologies, including indigenous methods, which must be carried out in all Pacific institutions of higher learning, and
v. the active networking of these institutions, including regular meetings, progress reports, and exchanges of data and staff.

The following recommendations require regional support for national institutions and governments.

15. Educational Policy Formulation and Development

i. The development of national educational visions and policies, based on a collective national vision defined by all stakeholders, be supported.
ii. Educational outcomes be broadened to reflect the new national vision.
iii. Wide consultation among all stakeholders in the process be encouraged.
iv. Policy decisions be disseminated to all stakeholders.
v. Research capacities of Pacific institutions be built, and appropriate research to support educational developments
be undertaken.
vi. The development of effective data and information management systems be supported to provide a sound basis for policy decisions and practices.

16. Curriculum Reform

i. The development of indigenous knowledge, worldviews, philosophies, arts, crafts, beliefs, etc. be supported so that these become integral foundations of the formal curriculum.

ii. Indigenous pedagogies become a part of all formal education pedagogies.

iii. The development of vernacular languages as the medium of instruction in early childhood education and primary education be supported. Alternative assessment techniques to reflect changes in the curriculum be developed.

17. Teacher Education

i. Indigenisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes etc. be assisted.

ii. Indigenisation of curriculum, pedagogies etc. be assisted.

iii. The status of teachers be raised through education at higher education institutions, and their conditions of service be improved.

iv. Experts on Pacific cultures be accorded status.

18. Financing Education including Foreign Aid

i. Dialogue with and between partners in education be facilitated.

ii. The use of Pacific peoples as consultants be promoted.

iii. Minimal strings be attached by donors to aid.

iv. Existing networks e.g. PATE be promoted and utilised to advocate for the indigenisation of education.

v. Appropriate research on educational aid be undertaken.
Index

Access iii, iv, 3, 7, 8, 9, 20, 23, 27, 32, 38, 43, 44, 49, 56, 58, 62, 71, 72, 74, 79, 81, 86, 95, 96, 99, 100, 113, 124, 127, 149, 150, 155, 157, 161, 170, 172, 176, 198, 200

Accountability 4-7, 57, 100, 177


Afamasaga x, 140

Aotearoa 164, 192, 194

Assessment v, 8, 9, 36, 39, 44, 71, 72, 80, 82, 84, 96, 97, 127, 131, 132, 137, 153, 154, 159, 183, 184, 189, 201, 204

Assumptions iii, viii, 16, 18-21, 29, 51, 77, 83, 86, 87, 104, 106, 149, 169

AusAid 55

Barriers 44, 169, 170, 195, 198

Basic education 2, 3, 30, 35, 53-56, 68, 82, 113, 127, 170, 176, 177

Challenges iii, viii, 1, 23, 27, 41, 43, 46, 47, 55, 71, 80, 82, 87, 94, 104-106, 118, 121, 122, 124, 125, 127, 129, 140, 141, 148, 164, 165, 167, 169, 194, 195

Citizenship 18, 60, 62, 149, 156


Context v, vi, 2, 9, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23, 27, 28, 31-33, 38, 39, 47, 61, 72, 77, 79, 80, 83, 90, 108, 109, 114, 116, 122, 124, 126, 136, 141, 151, 152, 156, 162, 164, 170, 171, 173, 176, 177, 190, 197, 201

Cook Islands 154, 165, 197, 203


Culture v, 2, 20, 21, 28, 30, 32, 34, 39, 45, 46, 48, 54, 60, 62, 70, 75, 89-93, 96-98, 101, 107, 110-112, 114, 116, 117, 126-128, 141, 170, 171, 173, 174, 177, 187, 190


Economy vi, 10, 16, 19, 31, 32, 39, 43,

Teaching styles 96, 101

Teaero i, ii, x, 51, 104, 111, 136, 137

Tertiary education 9, 53, 55, 60, 61, 127, 164, 166, 173, 174-176, 194, 195, 198, 199

Thaman ix, 21, 27, 51, 60, 61, 76, 80, 90, 93, 97, 107, 110, 113, 114, 132, 134, 140, 144, 171, 172

Tokelau 151, 153, 203

Tonga 5, 22, 41, 51, 73, 202

Traditional 2, 10, 13, 15, 29, 30, 31, 45, 50, 92, 98, 110, 112, 125, 126, 128, 149, 152, 154, 170, 171, 176, 187

Training 1, 2, 8, 9, 27, 41, 42, 44, 52, 69, 70, 84, 97-100, 104, 107, 110-112, 125, 132, 138, 142, 160, 174-176, 180-182, 187, 197-199, 201, 203

Tuioti ix, 194

UNESCO 6, 8, 34, 35, 55, 74, 79, 153

University i-iii, viii, 1, 6, 21, 27, 39, 48, 54, 55, 71, 82, 89, 90, 92, 94, 95, 104, 131, 137, 138, 140, 150, 151, 160, 175-177, 182, 202, 203

Values iii, iv, viii, 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 17-23, 31, 38, 41-47,
Tree of Opportunity

- processes and skills
- knowledge
- arts and crafts
- institutions
- languages
- values
- worldviews
- histories
- beliefs
The University of the South Pacific

The Tree of Opportunity symbolises the new vision for Pacific education based on the assumption that its main purpose is the survival, transformation, and sustainability of Pacific societies. The Tree of Opportunity is firmly rooted in Pacific cultures from which it gains the nourishment it needs to grow strong, so external elements can be grafted on without changing its fundamental root sources or identity. The Tree can accommodate the best of both old and new, can bear different fruits and flowers, and take people in many directions.