

## REGIONAL COLLABORATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION

*David Jenkins*

When new lecturers in Education at the University of the South Pacific first take their morning coffee in the School of Humanities social area, invitingly known as the Talanoa Room (a talk shop complete with ceremonial grog bowl?) almost the first image to assault their imaginations will be the authorised map of the USP region, depicting vast tracks of ocean divided up into jigsaw-like geometric shapes and appearing to cover a sizeable proportion of the surface of planet earth. The many islands appear almost a scattering of dots. The map-as-icon reflects equally the audacity and presumption of the USP enterprise, its willingness to serve a region so diverse and disparate in its communities and cultures, and to do so on a hope and a prayer.

At its crudest, the USP seeks to fulfil its regional obligation through its commitment to dual mode teaching, with University Extension perceived as lying at the heart of the University's mission, although regional students can and do opt for face to face teaching at the Laucala or other campuses, as subject specialisations determine. Increasingly, however, consideration is being given to other more complex forms of regional collaboration, some of which are the subjects of this article. In order to provide a wider context, it might be useful to note other facets of this broad agenda, involving the further provision of local tutorial support for USP courses, the enhancement of the regional centre as an intellectual rather than an administrative environment, and the exploration of satellite-based technologies to reduce, albeit patchily, the constraints imposed by distance.

I want to explore this idea of regional commitment and collaboration from the standpoint of the Department of Education and Psychology, and in particular link this theme to the new B.Ed degree that we will be commencing to teach in Semester I, 1994. Overwhelmingly, the major advantage enjoyed by the Education and Psychology Department in reviewing its position in relation to a regional teacher education policy is the presence and increasing maturity of the teacher education colleges. The burning question is how might our various institutions collaborate around a collective policy to their mutual advantage?

This is not, of course, a new question. Many will recall the conclusions of the World Bank *Pacific Regional Post-Secondary Educational Study*, which also raised the possibility of inter-institutional collaboration in teacher education, a theme picked up in the IOE Pacific Teacher Education Forward Planning Meeting (1992) and echoed in the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Report on the Future of Distance Learning at the USP. I would now like to place on record how we have attempted to respond to this agenda, one which we have widely discussed with our regional stakeholders.

The B.Ed is conceived as a three-year programme which will be available in three strands - a secondary strand, a primary strand and an early years strand. These will be phased in over three years with the secondary strand commencing in the next academic year. For a three-year programme to combine degree level subject study with QTS (qualified teacher status) is already to cut down by one year the length of time needed for a degree plus QTS by the consecutive route whereby the holder of a degree registers for a PGCE. The niche that the programme is aimed at is to cater for those students who wish to be teachers (or in the in-service version are teachers already) and who seek a concurrent structure with strong academic and professional elements. The programme consists of two majors, one in a teaching subject and one in Education, with English for Academic Purposes and a newly designed Selective Studies course, chosen from broad fields like Integrated Arts and Physical and Leisure Education lying alongside, together with some courses in a second teaching subject (which may incorporate some so-called "service" courses associated with the subject major). In its in-service version

the programme is targeted at teachers who will already have completed a Dip. Ed either at the USP or at a Teachers' College in the region, and have some teaching experience. For such students there will be a slightly different arrangement of the eight Education courses in the degree structure, since Education requires the taking of five compulsory courses, plus three from four optional strands, allowing a degree of specialisation towards curriculum, evaluation, administration or non-formal education.

Cross-crediting arrangements are being put in place which will allow students, within the University's usual "50% rule", to cross-credit appropriate courses from the Diploma into the B.Ed, thereby enabling the students to complete the programme in less than three years. We like to think that this possibility of "topping up" Diploma qualifications will become one of the well understood options for regional teachers, and that there will be practical sympathy at government level for our determination to offer graduate qualifications to those seeking to enhance their professional contribution to primary and early years education, rather than treating a degree as a ticket for the secondary sector. This implies a statement of comparative worth on behalf of those teaching the younger age groups, a philosophy that needs to be better reflected in financial and other arrangements.

Discussions concerning cross-crediting will hopefully lead to a two-way professional influence so that the courses offered at the USP maximise their usefulness in relation to the overall emerging regional teacher education strategy. The University also sees itself as a natural supplier of research encouragement and supervisory support to tutors from the colleges wishing to acquire higher degrees, and as the University reconsiders the role of local tutorial support in its distance learning programme, the hope is that, within Education at least, a whole regional network of people might be established who could work with and alongside us. In its most exciting version, these ideas could lead us in the direction of franchising whole courses or the development of joint programmes, as well as enabling University Extension better to fulfil its regional mission by making supervised teaching practice (both for the B.Ed and the PGCE) available throughout the region by utilising the network of expertise available in a more collaborative way.

\* \* \* \* \*