

## **Re-thinking Educational Reform in the Pacific**

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*This paper argues for a specific emphasis to be placed on a subjective and spiritual approach to be taken to educational reform when interrogating education in the Pacific. As part of taking a more holistic approach, the spiritual development—heart and soul knowledge—of students should not be neglected. This would be in line with the ‘learning to be’ pillar of learning advocated by the Delors Report commissioned by UNESCO. The paper suggests that cultural and spiritual values of each Pacific country should underpin reform of education in the Pacific.*

### **Introduction**

A groundswell of opinion on the critical importance of re-thinking education in the Pacific is rising from Pacific nations and their educators (See for example Taufe‘ulungaki 2002; Thaman 2002; Sanga 2002; Afamasaga 2002; Puamau 2002; Teairo 2002; Heine 2002; Nabobo 2002; Niroa 2004). They recognise that their education systems are still caught up in a colonised time warp, despite the fact that most Pacific nations have been politically independent for some decades. The issues of control and ownership of the processes and structures of education are particularly important to them. Moreover, an interrogation of the values and assumptions that underpin formal education is taking place in knowledge sites such as universities. Pacific educators are concerned because the same issues of access, equity, relevance, quality, efficiency and effectiveness that confronted Pacific education three decades ago still abound today, despite much investment in educational reform by governments and donor agencies.

For the purposes of this paper, the Pacific refers to the 15 independent countries in the Pacific region. This includes four larger nations: Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands and Vanuatu; seven not so large nations: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa and Tonga; and four small island nations: Niue, Nauru,

Tokelau and Tuvalu. From the smallest nation of Tokelau to the largest of PNG, many reforms are being undertaken in an attempt to improve the quality of their education systems.

Using postcolonial theoretical resources, this paper analyses the impact of such forces as colonialism and educational aid on the capacity of Pacific nations to attain and maintain control and ownership of their education systems: the content and processes of learning; pedagogies of the teacher; organisational structures; management cultures; and approaches to assessment and evaluation. The paper attempts to provide a way forward by exploring conceptual underpinnings that lead to a new approach based on syncretisation of: the local and the global; insider and outsider perspectives; academic, technical and lifelong learning; and the temporal and spiritual. In re-thinking educational reform in the Pacific region, it is important to take a holistic approach. The privileging of a more subjective and spiritual approach to educational reform is the thread that will seek to integrate the paper.

In this paper, I take a 'strategic essentialist'<sup>1</sup> (Spivak 1990, 1995) position as an 'insider' indigenous Pacific Islander. In using essentialism as a strategy, I contend that the Pacific is basically indigenous and Christian to validate the lived experiences of the indigenous peoples of each Pacific country in order to strengthen my argument for their cultural and spiritual values to underpin the reform of education. My treatment of the Pacific region seems to assume homogeneity when this is clearly not the case. I acknowledge the heterogeneity, complexities, specificities and multiplicities of contexts and situations of the 15 Pacific countries covered in the paper. Moreover, if there are any contradictions or ambivalences, this will demonstrate that there are no easy answers to the issues confronting the Pacific region.

### **The colonial legacy**

With the exception of Tonga, the Pacific region has been colonised by various 'western' countries over the last three centuries. The primary instruments of control of colonised subjects were (and still are) written history (texts), education and language. Colonial practices—including the historical, imaginative, material, institutional and discursive—have significantly

transformed Pacific ways of knowing, being and doing. The ideological, political, economic and social structures currently in place today are manifestations and hybrid versions of the colonial project. Colonial ways of knowing and doing, together with 'western' values, attitudes and cultural practices, permeate the lived experiences of the colonised to such an extent that they have become part of the postcolonial landscape. At the point of decolonisation, if there is no deliberate effort to resist, overthrow, even transform these colonial legacies, then inherited structures and systems will become normative and hegemonic fixtures of national life.

Because every education system is shaped by its national history and socio-cultural, political and economic contexts, the education systems in the Pacific region are manifestations of their colonial histories. For instance, the educational structures in Fiji are modelled on the British system. Similarly, Palau, RMI and FSM continue to maintain strong ties with the United States of America; the Cook Islands, Tokelau and Niue have close ties with New Zealand; while Vanuatu faces the challenge of dual Anglophone and Francophone systems. The curricula, teaching methods, assessment and evaluation methods, languages of instruction, administration and management models, and organisational cultures of schooling in the Pacific continue in hegemonic forms, usually closely resembling those in place during the old colonial days.

The most insidious element of neocolonialism, defined as "the highest form of colonialism" (Altbach 1995: 452), is that relatively little change to the education system occurs after former colonies attain political independence (Puamau 1999a: 40). As Ashcroft *et al.* (1995: 424) put it, "Education is perhaps the most insidious and in some ways the most cryptic of colonialist survivals, older systems now passing, sometimes imperceptibly, into neo-colonial configurations". In the case of the Pacific, educational apparatuses can be described as hegemonic because once structures such as curriculum assessment and school organisation become entrenched and institutionalised, they have a totalising effect on society. Education deeply saturates "the consciousness of a society" (Williams 1976: 204) and becomes unquestionably what parents want for their children.

Pacific countries, because of their colonial legacy, also face the deeper challenge of decolonising colonial mindsets inherited from centuries of colonial subjugation, oppression and power play. Stepping out of the colonial box into postcolonial<sup>1</sup> conditions must start where it counts most—in the mind. A psychological/mental deconstruction must take place—an interrogation of the colonial past and postcolonial present in order to renegotiate the way to a more effective syncretism of local and global worlds. Pacific Islanders need to find a constructive and practical way to “deconstruct the concept, the authority and assumed primacy of the West” (Young 1990). They must analyse the insidious effects of their colonial past not with the purpose of criticising or blaming the colonisers but with the goal of transforming their mindsets in order to reclaim or restore the best of what was lost, subverted or ignored in the colonial era and its aftermath.

#### **A Pacific vision for education**

Is it possible to have education systems that are owned by the people of the Pacific? In light of over a century of colonisation, and the current colonial substitutes of globalisation and educational aid, can Pacific educators develop their own distinctively local systems, firmly founded on their local cultures and traditions, and strongly underpinned by indigenous value systems, philosophies and epistemologies? Is it possible, even desirable, to do so?

Two important initiatives, both established in 2001, that provide a vision of education in the Pacific are the Re-thinking Pacific Education Initiative (RPEI<sup>1</sup>) and the Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP), the former developed by concerned Pacific educators and the latter by fifteen Pacific Ministers of Education under the umbrella of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS).

The *Re-thinking Education Colloquium* held in Suva, Fiji in 2001, the first of many initiatives under the RPEI, began with the assumption that more than three decades of extensive educational reforms in Pacific education and

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1. RPEI was changed in April 2005 to RPEIPP ~ Re-thinking Pacific Education Initiative for and by Pacific Peoples

significant investments by national governments and donor agencies have not succeeded in providing the quality human resources needed to achieve national developmental goals. The regional representatives at the Colloquium were concerned that educational reforms have focused too narrowly on improving various aspects of the quantification of education with little attention given to questioning the values and assumptions underpinning formal education. As Taufe'ulungaki (2002: 15) puts it, "The failure of education in the Pacific can be attributed to a large degree to the imposition of an alien system designed for western social and cultural contexts, which are underpinned by quite different values." A continuing interrogation needs to take place about the values, beliefs, assumptions and ideologies that underpin 'neo-colonial' Pacific educational systems.

The Colloquium agreed on the *Tree of Opportunity* as the most appropriate metaphor for re-thinking Pacific education. In this reconceptualisation, education is firmly rooted in the cultures of Pacific societies—in their values, beliefs, histories, worldviews, philosophies, processes and skills, knowledge, arts and crafts, institutions and languages. 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 context 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. (Pene *et al.* 2002: 3)

Similarly, the FBEAP document arose out of a desire of Pacific Ministers for Education to achieve universal educational participation and achievement; ensure access and equity and improve quality and outcomes (PIFS 2001). The vision for Pacific education is specified in FBEAP as:

Basic education as the fundamental building block for society should engender the broader life skills that lead to social cohesion and provide the foundations for vocational callings, higher education and lifelong learning. These when combined

with enhanced employment opportunities create a higher level of personal and societal security and development.

Forum members recognised that development of basic education takes place in the context of commitments to the world community and meeting the new demands of the global economy, which should be balanced with the enhancement of their own distinctive Pacific values, morals, social, political, economic and cultural heritages, and reflect the Pacific's unique geographical context. (PIFS, 2001: 1-2)

The Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of basic Education (the PRIDE Project) was launched in 2004 to implement this Pacific vision for education in the 14 Pacific member states of the Pacific Forum Secretariat together with Tokelau. Its overall objective is:

To expand opportunities for children and youth to acquire the values, knowledge and skills that will enable them to actively participate in the social, spiritual, economic and cultural development of their communities and to contribute positively to creating sustainable futures. ([www.usp.ac.fj/pride](http://www.usp.ac.fj/pride))

### **Voice and speaking positions**

The issue of voice and speaking positions is one of critical importance in postcolonial discourse. As bell hooks (1989: 9) puts it, "moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible".

The important point to note regarding the RPEI, FBEAP and the PRIDE Project is the emphasis placed on Pacific people deciding for themselves what is best for their communities. The insider perspective is crucial here because of their intimate knowledge and experience, and their collective wisdoms. The related issue of voice is also critical as it emphasises the importance of Pacific educators and communities speaking out of themselves and for themselves. The collective voice therefore of Pacific educators and peoples on issues that are close to their hearts and souls is a poignant resistance to and reclaiming of lost ground 'stolen' from them by their colonial past. The issues of

representation, power and control will come full circle to Pacific peoples through this process of reclaiming a Pacific vision of education, decided on by Pacific people for Pacific people, so that they can own the process of education and allow healing from the devastating impact of the colonial encounter.

It could be argued that it was the 'voice' of the initiators of the RPEI and their successful influence at the Pacific Ministers of Education meeting in Auckland 2001, held under the aegis of PIFS, that resulted in the development of FBEAP ultimately the birth of the PRIDE Project in 2004. It was also the 'voice' of the Ministers of Education from the Pacific that articulated in a powerful way what it considered to be a Pacific vision for education.

### **Re-thinking educational reform in the Pacific**

Given the profound and pervasive psychological repercussions of colonialism and globalisation, and given the increasing pressures to conform to international benchmarks and conditions that come with accepting foreign educational aid, can Pacific people change the 'colonial mindsets' that many of them are still trapped within? Is it possible for them to change the philosophies, ideologies, values and structures that currently underpin their educational systems? Do they have the will, the courage, the energy and the resources to transform their education systems into what they perceive to be best for their people and nation? Can they truly own and control the formal education process? Is it possible to have a genuine Pacific vision of education? What shape should the re-thinking of educational reform in the Pacific take? What are the parameters that should guide the direction of this re-thinking process? Who decides? Whose voice(s) ought to speak and be heard? What place do 'outsider' perspectives have in the re-thinking of Pacific education? These are some important questions that need to be addressed by educators and concerned stakeholders engaged in re-thinking educational reform in the Pacific.

There are many challenges ahead, particularly coming from outside the Pacific. Pacific nations are struggling to keep up with the impact of globalisation, with the rapid increase in cross-border economic, social and technological

exchange under conditions of capitalism. In order to survive in an increasingly sophisticated technological world, they need to log onto the information superhighway and keep up with worldwide trends and developments. They must align their development plans to international political, economic and educational conventions and laws. They must play the game of keeping up with trade deficits, and of maintaining national economic systems against the powerful homogenising impact of western cultural practices, the influence of the media and the dictates of market forces. And they continue to depend on development assistance to fund many national activities.

Foreign donor agencies have driven many educational reforms in the Pacific region. Reforms over the last three decades at all levels of schooling have centred mainly on curriculum development, assessment, teacher education, and resource development to support curriculum change. While a critique of development assistance shows that donor countries benefit most from the aid relationship (see, for example, Nabobo 2003), the benefits of educational aid for recipient countries must be acknowledged. For example, teacher training assistance has seen capacity-building of a significant number of lecturers. Expensive infrastructure, such as classrooms, lecture rooms, hostels, libraries and toilet blocks has been provided through aid-funded projects. Additionally, many locals have been employed in aid projects that have included capacity-building of local professional and management staff who then become highly marketable on the international stage. Moreover, scholarship programmes have enabled many Pacific Islanders to obtain a tertiary education, including postgraduate degrees. Without development assistance, it is highly unlikely that small island states could have afforded these expenditures, given their small national budgets.

However research (e.g. Tari 2004; PIFS 2001) and personal reflections (e.g. Singh 2002; Teaero 2002) in the Pacific region indicate that, despite reforms in training teachers, revising curricula, providing resources, upgrading facilities, mobilising community support, and improving leadership and school management, quality education is still not being achieved. The same issues that faced Pacific education three decades ago in terms of quality, access, equity, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and student achievement continue to plague Pacific nations. And despite Pacific governments and donor agencies



investing heavily in the education sector, the learning outcomes for most students have not improved. In fact, many students continue to fail in schooling at alarming rates (Puamau 1999a.)

Very little attention has been given to interrogating curriculum, school culture, structure and organisation, including the values that underpin evaluation and assessment of learning. The “values and belief systems that underpin the behaviours and actions of individuals and institutions, and the structures and processes they create” need to undergo fundamental change (Pene *et al.* 2002: 1). The ineffectiveness of Pacific education can be attributed to the “increasing 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”(Pene *et al.* 2002: 1).

Donor agencies and ‘outsiders’ need therefore to dismantle their own mindsets about the capability of Pacific Islanders who, in many cases remain the ‘others’ of Europe. During the colonial era, the colonisers stressed the cultural and racial difference of the ‘other’ by asserting their domination and superiority over them. This occurred in every lived sphere of colonial subjects through stereotyping and discrimination against the colonised and became institutionalised in the structures of colonial society. This ‘epistemic violence’ (Spivak 1995: 24-25) against the ‘subaltern’ (oppressed subject who is of inferior rank) by constituting the colonial subject as Other “unleashed a myriad cultural and psychological forces, many of them not fully manifest even after 500 years” (Sardar *et al.* 1993: 83). This ‘othering’ process has continued in the postcolonial era, with many aid agencies and outside consultants still taking the dominant and controlling position in the aid relationship. Others are seeking to develop a culture of collaboration and consultation where the aid relationship is seen as an ‘equal’ one and where donors try to understand Pacific perspectives and ways of thinking and doing and to work in more culturally acceptable and appropriate ways.

### **A holistic approach**

How can education reform in the Pacific be reconceptualised? A holistic approach needs to be taken, not only in discussions on education in the Pacific

but more importantly in its practices and processes. Currently, learning and what happens in schools is disparate and disconnected from the daily lives of students. It is mainly abstract, too academic and fragmented. In order to regain wholeness and a seamless connection in education, a shift must now occur in the following areas:

(1) Balanced and holistic ways of ‘knowing’, ‘doing’, ‘being’ and ‘living together’, the four pillars of learning advocated by the Delors Report (1996) need to be reflected in curricula. The current perception that livelihoods and life skills knowledges are of second class status should be discarded. A more holistic approach to learning would necessitate a better balance in academic, technical, vocational, life skills and lifelong learning. Moreover, a holistic approach needs to be taken also to the old demarcations between the various levels of education—pre-school, kindergarten, primary/elementary, secondary, technical/vocational—with more effective articulation between each level.

(2) Because formal schooling is largely derived from foreign value systems, there is a serious cultural gap between the lived experiences of most Pacific Island students and what is offered in schools, including the way schooling is organised and structured, the culture and ethos of schooling, its pedagogical practices and the assessment of learning. And because the outcomes of schooling continue to be measured in terms of examination passes, many Pacific Islanders fail to succeed in school. A holistic approach to education will also mean a re-thinking of all these factors.

(3) A holistic approach to education will particularly necessitate a culturally inclusive curriculum where cultural and linguistic literacy is part of what is offered in schools (Thaman 1992). It is critical that every child learns the language, culture and traditions of the particular human society into which s/he is born. This is particularly so for indigenous cultures. It is important that the curriculum is grounded in the local cultural systems of knowledge and wisdom. The cultural identity of indigenous peoples must be reaffirmed at school, beginning with a culturally inclusive and democratic curriculum which halts the “cultural and environmental bankruptcy” that is “an affliction which has been an obstacle to sustainable development in much of the modern world” (Thaman 1995: 732). It is envisaged that curriculum development for schools

(Thaman 1992) and teacher training institutions (Thaman 1996) will focus on making the curriculum more culturally democratic at these sites.

(4) The spiritual development of the child currently is missing from most educational discourse in the Pacific. This is a serious gap that needs to be rectified. An emphasis on spiritual development or moral education needs to occur in Pacific schools. The region has successfully internalised Christianity as the dominant religion. Because the bulk of a child's waking hours are spent at school, and because of changing economic and social conditions which weaken the role of the church and families, I believe schools and their teachers now have a crucial role in building morally strong citizens for the future. The teaching of Christian values and principles therefore should be incorporated into the curricula of Pacific schools. At the same time, however, an inclusive environment strongly suggests that the spiritual needs of non-Christian students also be taken into account. Schools that are run by non-Christian religious organisations can teach their own doctrines but make the curriculum inclusive of students with other religious orientations.

Countries that are developing or reviewing their curricula should ask the following questions (Puamau 1999a: 330):

- a) What are the current curriculum goals? What should the goals be?
- b) What and whose values, philosophy, ideology does the curriculum profess? What and whose values or ideals should it promote?
- c) What knowledge, skills and attitudes should the curriculum emphasise?
- d) Who decides on content?
- e) What language should the curriculum be taught in?
- f) Whose interests will the curriculum serve?
- g) What are the social, educational, economic and political implications of such a curriculum?

In order to have a holistic approach to curriculum reconceptualisation, these questions should be answered in light of the quest to be culturally inclusive, to be cognisant of indigenous concerns, and to blend both local and global ways of knowing and doing. Values education or spiritual development should also be included in this holistic approach to education.

### **Local/global intersections**

To take a holistic approach also means syncretising local and global perspectives in order to adopt the best of both. The successful blending of global and local ways of thinking and doing is at the heart of the PRIDE Project. However, before blending the local and global, it is critical to develop solid local foundations, where Pacific Islanders have explored all micro dimensions of their specific contexts in order to build a strong body of local/Pacific knowledge. Pacific researchers should take a deliberate stance to document and record local perspectives and solutions. An example is Sanga's (2004) valuable account of how his community in the Solomon Islands resolved conflict at the community level without external help by drawing on their spiritual reserves firmly founded on their Christian faith. This account is invaluable, not only for its emphasis on the need for good leadership by the elders in the community, but also and just as importantly, for its emphasis on Christian faith as the most powerful weapon in dealing with tribal conflict.

In terms of the reconceptualisation of the curriculum, there needs to be a review of the content of learning so that the local and global occupy a balanced space. The curriculum should not only be culturally democratic, but also geared to meet the challenging 'new times' that are characteristic of the western world. The reconceptualised curriculum should address the question of how students re-invent themselves as culturally hybrid, complex and dynamic human subjects in a new global era.

A synthesis, therefore, of the best from indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge bases seems the most useful approach to take, the curriculum striking a balance between the local and global. It must take into account the need to value the cultural identity of the indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Sir Geoffrey Henry (1992: 14), then Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, summed it up thus:

One thing that the University of Life has taught me is that, while there are black and white dogmas, philosophies, and solutions, the areas of grey are large... The ideologies belong to the extremes while, between them, there exists an infinite range of possibilities... With such a range of opportunity, answers will emerge.

It is this range of opportunities, of possibilities that exist between the extremities of non-western and western knowledge systems that should be explored in order to ensure both cultural and social survival yet, just as importantly, economic survival in postmodern conditions heavily influenced by the processes of colonialism, neocolonialism, westernisation, globalisation and economic rationalism. Pacific nations should, therefore, be concerned not only about the role of education in preserving essential knowledges, skills and values for the maintenance of local cultural identity, but also the role of education in generating new values and competencies considered necessary for the future development of the country in a competitive global world (Power 1992: 17).

### **Reality of the spiritual - values and moral education**

In the Pacific, I believe it is necessary for education to take a more subjective and spiritual approach, and to include local values, ethics and wisdoms. As in Western schools, however, the spiritual—heart and soul knowledge—is largely absent from Pacific schooling. Because of the spiritual nature of Pacific Islanders where Christian faith is an integral part of their lives, this dimension needs to be valued and brought into the curriculum. A commitment to building a strong foundation for Pacific education in the cultural values and spirituality of each country would contribute to the ‘learning to be’ and ‘learning to live together’ pillars of learning that the Delors Report (1996) advocates.

This concern to ground Pacific education in the spirituality of each country resonates with Edmund O’Sullivan’s argument that contemporary western education lacks a comprehensive cosmology and “must take on the concerns of the development of the spirit at a more fundamental level” (1999: 259). He observes that both traditional wisdom, particularly of indigenous cultures, and an emergent form of knowledge coming from the ecological sciences provide a radical view of the earth community. He notes that the traditional western scientific perspective has much to learn from indigenous world views regarding a balanced relationship between humans and nature.

The dominant faith in the Pacific is Christianity, a legacy of the evangelising work of missionaries who came in the wake of colonial expansion, or perhaps

even drove it. The missionaries, together with traders and beachcombers, became colonial agents, working with colonial governments to annex and transform Pacific islands. They developed orthographies for some indigenous languages, translated the Bible into the vernacular, and established rudimentary schools to teach the 'natives' how to read so that they could study the Bible. Christianising most of the Pacific through these means allowed formal schooling to be introduced in the colonies.

Most indigenous Pacific Islanders were (and still are) deeply spiritual. They found significant resonance between their traditional spiritualities and the newly introduced Christian faith, and rapidly syncretised their own values and beliefs with it. As a consequence Christian discourse became well established in social and political life. For example, in Tonga today, everything comes to a halt on Sunday which is officially and legally declared the national day of rest for everyone, resident or visitor. There is no commercial activity<sup>3</sup>airports and wharves are closed, shops are shut, no taxis or buses are allowed to operate and no one is allowed to play any sports. Similarly, one will usually not find Christians playing local or national sports on Sunday in Fiji and Samoa as this is revered as the Sabbath. As all Pacific constitutions are founded on the values and principles of Christianity, it makes sense that these principles and values should underpin the reform of education.

In my own view the Pacific needs citizens who are not only strongly rooted in their traditional cultures, languages and epistemologies but who are equally strongly grounded in their Christian faith, confident to take their place on both local and international stages. This will be in keeping with the overall objective of the PRIDE Project: "to expand opportunities for children and youth to acquire the values, knowledge and skills that will enable them to actively participate in the social, spiritual, economic and cultural development of their communities and to contribute positively to creating sustainable futures" (PRIDE 2003: 6).

Are there inherent contradictions in the fact that many Pacific Islanders who critique the impact of colonialism at the same time deeply value Christian beliefs and principles? Why have Pacific Islanders embraced Christianity and made it their own yet are looking for alternatives to their education

systems? The answer lies in the ownership principle. The wholehearted acceptance of Christianity has enabled it to permeate the lived reality of many Pacific societies. People have taken ownership of it, internalising its values and principles. On the other hand, formal schooling is still viewed as foreign, abstract, meaningless and irrelevant by many people. Because the culture of schooling generally is not synchronous with the culture of the students, high failure rates and underachievement are the norm for many Pacific Islanders (Puamau 1999b). Many indigenous communities have successfully integrated Christianity into their cultural practices, yet view schooling to be outside their ambit of control and something difficult to understand.

Most indigenous Pacific Islanders express a close affinity with their Christian God, land, nature, village and kinspeople. They value and maintain their social and religious relationships. It is the intricate network of social, family and church relationships that helps to ensure the survival of the group through interdependence and cooperation. The interests of the group and not of the individual are important to them. Their thinking is based on mutuality, not separateness.

What values, then, should underpin Pacific educational systems? I have already indicated that Christian values currently underpin the constitutions of the Pacific Islands. It is my contention that Christian values also should underpin the curriculum and permeate the organisation and culture of Pacific schools. A balance needs to be struck in the notion that education and religion are separate entities and should not merge. A thread underlying this paper is the principle that Pacific values and ways of thinking and doing should become a hegemonic feature of everyday life and underpin Pacific education systems. Educational and political leaders need to deliberately analyse and unpick the current content, practices and organisation of schooling to see where more emphasis can be placed on the spiritual development of students. After all, a holistic, balanced and inter-connected approach would mean a good balance in the academic (mental), social, physical, cultural and spiritual development of each student.

I have taken a strategic essentialist position in arguing for indigenous cultural values and Christian values to underpin education in all Pacific countries

covered in this chapter. In Fiji, however, where there is a sizeable non-Christian population, and in other Pacific countries where non-Christian organisations have set up schools, I must make the point that their freedom to practise their religion or culture is never in question. I admire Muslim, Hindu and other religious organisations in Fiji whose schools are solidly built on their religious and cultural values and beliefs which are respected by people of other religions who choose to attend these schools. This is the very principle and model that I draw on for state and Christian schools to be founded on.

The issue of making moral and ethical decisions is significant in these new times of rapid social, cultural, political, economic and technological change. As mentioned earlier, students will need to be guided into making sound moral and ethical choices in everything they do, whether in or outside the classroom. While the family, as the basic social unit of society, and the church can play a significant role in this area, their impact is neutralised by the changing dynamics brought about by urbanisation, globalisation, changing economic structures including high levels of poverty and the like. It is therefore imperative that schools also take the lead in 'teaching' and 'practising' sound moral values. The building of character through moral education should be strongly emphasised in school organisation and curriculum so that upright, law-abiding citizens are produced who can live lives of moral significance.

As emphasised already, Pacific schools should also be underpinned by Pacific indigenous values, principles, beliefs, ideologies, knowledges and wisdoms. As indicated earlier, there is no logical inconsistency between indigeneity and Christianity because Pacific Islanders have so successfully integrated their Christian faith into their cultures. The cultural values of Pacific Islanders should saturate their individual and collective consciousness so that they permeate the educational system and become hegemonic features of the educational landscape. For example, the underlying values and beliefs that guide local Pacific planning processes include: cooperation; unity; reciprocity; respect for authority, each other and the environment; maintaining culture and traditions; maintaining family and community relationships; sharing and caring; religious or spiritual nurturing; moral character development; and capacity-building.



The re-thinking initiative of Pacific educators should continue to examine ways that the spiritual and the cultural can become embedded in the school. There is a real need for heart and soul knowledge alongside the head knowledge emphasised through academic discourse. This will contribute to reclaiming 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together' in Pacific education. Further research is needed in these areas because they currently hold such marginal positions in education discourse.

### **Concluding remarks**

There is no doubt that the colonial encounter with indigenous peoples of the Pacific region, as elsewhere, brought untold psychological, social and cultural damage. After decolonisation Pacific peoples, living in small island countries, continue to grapple with challenges brought about by the impact and influence of neocolonialism, westernisation, globalisation, foreign aid and market capitalism. The education systems, amongst other things, in each of the 15 Pacific countries of the PRIDE Project have been significantly affected by these onslaughts.

Increasing numbers of educated Pacific Islanders, particularly in Pacific and New Zealand universities, have begun to question and interrogate the values, beliefs, world views, ideologies, processes and structures that underpin their current realities. They have begun the process of unpicking their way through the effects of colonialism in order to make sense of where they are, before they can chart a progressive way forward for the Pacific. This is particularly evident in the 'Re-thinking Pacific Education Initiative' discussed in this paper which has provided the impetus for a more aggressive interrogation of the historical past and postcolonial present. The need for a collective mobilisation of the Pacific spirit in order to bring about a positive transformation in the lives of local communities is evident.

In reconceptualising educational reform in the Pacific, and the work of the PRIDE Project, the need for a holistic approach to education, including grounding formal schooling in the spiritual and cultural realities of indigenous communities, has been emphasised. This holistic approach should also include

working towards a balance in the following areas: curriculum coverage; levels of schooling; school structures and lived experiences of Pacific peoples; local and global intersections; and insider and outsider perspectives. Research that concerns Pacific education and its relationship to development, amongst other things, needs to be undertaken on a more intense scale in order to build up a body of knowledge that is unique to the Pacific.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The term 'strategic essentialism' refers to the use of essentialism as a strategy to effect agency or voice for disadvantaged or marginalised groups. In the case of Pacific Islanders disadvantaged in profound ways by the processes of colonialism and neocolonialism, postcolonial theorists writing in academia or indigenous people can use this strategy of being essentialist, totalising or deterministic in order to effect voice and agency for themselves in order to recover the voice, space and the dignity of 'knowing themselves and of themselves by themselves' (Puamau, 1999a: 51).

<sup>2</sup> The term 'postcolonial' is a hotly contested one and much theorizing revolves around it. A useful definition is given by Leela Gandhi (1998: 4) who defines postcolonialism as "a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past".