Inclusive education in the Pacific
Chapter 13
Emerging issues in inclusive education
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The stories we tell and how we tell them shape how we think about things. What stories can we tell about how we educate our children? How can these stories shape our future?

Malaki’s story—living the dream

Malaki is a five-year-old boy living in a rural village in Samoa. He is bright and confident and has severe hearing loss in both ears. He goes to the local village primary school.

How can this happen? How does the teacher talk to him if he cannot hear? How can he play with the other children if he does not know what they are saying?

All of these things are possible because of inclusive education (IE). Many good things have happened to make it possible for Malaki to attend his local school. His parents believed that it was his right to go to his local school and be supported to learn alongside his peers. The government provided in-service training for the teachers, as well as resources such as sign language books. They also organised meetings for the teachers to discuss IE. His parents and teachers have learned sign language and have regular training with other parents and supporters. Members of a local early intervention non-government organisation (NGO) visit the school to share their expertise and provide advice. Every time a barrier is identified, Malaki’s family and teachers meet and work out a way to overcome it. Malaki is learning to say a few words now and can sign simple sentences. He is happy at school and school is happy with Malaki.

Lesson learned: Where there is a will there is a way, especially when everyone works together.

1. Advancing IE in the Pacific Workshop, 1 – 5 October 2007, Nadi, Fiji. Samoa country presentation, see Chapter 11.
Ruci’s Story—IE works!

“My name is Ruci Senikula. At the age of six, I was enrolled at the Fiji School for the Blind and began my primary education. In 1994, I was fortunate to be integrated into a mainstream primary school. I continued through primary education and pursued secondary education in the mainstream too.

Learning in a regular school was a real challenge. Firstly, students did not know how to react to having a child with a disability in the classroom. At first, both teachers and students were either not sure of what to do or they were just ignorant. Sometimes, teachers and the school management lacked the knowledge or the ability to fit me into their normal teaching environment. However, after spending weeks with me in the classroom, students began to realise that there was a need to help me and so they began to dictate notes that the teacher wrote on the blackboard. At other times, teachers would read out notes aloud in class and every student would write them down, including myself.

In 2006, I enrolled at the University of the South Pacific to pursue studies in Applied Psychology and Education, where I am now in my second year.”

Lesson learned: Children who learn together, learn to live together.

Junior’s story—getting to school

Junior uses a wheelchair. Although he lives close to his local school, the road is too bumpy for his mother to get him to school. When the principal heard about Junior, she organised a roster of the boys in the rugby team to go to his house each day. One boy carried Junior and another boy carried his wheelchair. If Junior did not come to school, there was no rugby practice that day! (McCullough, 2005:6)

Lesson learned: Think outside the box.

Introduction

The stories at the beginning of this chapter are only a few of the many helpful and hopeful stories about inclusive education that were shared at the Advancing

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Inclusive Education in the Pacific Workshop that was held in Nadi, Fiji, from 1 – 5 October, 2007. The workshop brought together a wide range of people representing disabled people’s organisations (DPOs), government ministries and departments, NGOs and interested individuals from 14 Pacific states. The aim of the workshop was to give participants the opportunity to share experiences and understanding of IE in their own countries and in the Pacific region, and to work towards developing strategies for the future. The keynote speeches, presentations, panel discussions and case studies provided a broad context for working towards a Pacific-specific understanding of inclusive education.

From this workshop, three key issues emerged which will require consideration and action in order to ensure, promote and activate the rights to education for all children.

**Emerging Issue 1 – Education is a right for all children**

Throughout the workshop, many references were made regarding education as a right for all children. Many international declarations and mandates were identified and discussed. A summary of those relevant to both IE and the Pacific is given below.

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The World Declaration on Education for All
- The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities
- The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education
- Salamanca Five Years on Review
- World Education Forum Framework for Action, Dakar
- Millennium Development Goals – Poverty Reduction and Development
- EFA Flagship on Education and Disability.

Pacific nations have participated in many of these fora and have agreed to and signed many of these rights-based global, international and regional initiatives that call for commitment and action in order to achieve education for all. So, why, after more than 60 years of agreeing, pledging and signing a vast array of declarations, frameworks and international, regional and national plans, are
children with disability, children who are poor, children who are marginalised by a variety of circumstances still not being educated?

Dr Visesio Pongi, Director of the UNESCO Apia Office, reminded us in his keynote speech at this workshop that, globally, more than 90% of children with disabilities in developing nations are either excluded from education or marginalised within educational systems. He went on to say that approximately 500,000 children per year lose some part of their vision due to vitamin A deficiency and that some 41 million babies are born each year at risk of mental impairment due to the poor diet of their mother. Furthermore, most of the individuals with hearing or visual impairment in developing nations do not have basic reading skills and those with intellectual impairment are often treated with cruelty and neglect. Sadly, there is a strong link between disability and poverty.

Inclusive education is based on the right to education for all children. It is welcoming all students and all learning situations because of the fundamental belief that all children can learn and all children have the right to learn and be educated. This right is not just for those who can fit into current formal education systems, which often promote hierarchal competitiveness. Nor is IE simply a separate part of an education system, a part that is just tacked on to accommodate those who are perceived to be unable to participate in the current educational process. Education and learning opportunities are major factors in overcoming economic and social inequalities for those seen to be outside typical educational parameters.

As Penelope Price mentioned in her paper (See Chapter 6), numerous international documents and global events continue to raise awareness and give structure and guidance for the development of IE. Of significance to the Pacific region is the Forum Education Ministers’ meeting in 2002, at which the Ministers agreed to adopt the following three key recommendations from the third priority area of the Biwako Millenium Framework (BMW):

- to achieve the BMW targets for access to primary school for children with disabilities
- to review and strengthen regional teacher training opportunities
- to develop a regional programme to develop capacity that will provide inclusive education for children with disabilities.
This was further developed during a Pacific expert group meeting held by UNESCAP in Nadi in March 2007 to set Pacific principles in education through:

- early identification and intervention
- increased access to schools for children with disabilities
- transformation to inclusive systems with emphasis on teacher training for a diverse range of abilities.

**Transformation** is a very important word. It implies a fluidity of movement that enables those current education practices which are positive and useful to move forward and merge with other positive activities to embrace the concepts inherent in IE. The fact that transformation to inclusive education is being documented and agreed to at these high governmental levels is important, because governments can be held accountable for their actions—or their lack of action.

There are also regional networks that can raise the visibility of IE and provide a forum for sharing successes and articulating concerns. Networks are vital to the learning process. They provide opportunities to listen and learn, to debate and to voice collectively both the celebrations and the challenges. The opportunities to network within the Pacific region mean that, while each country is unique, some of the challenges faced are part of the location, culture and values of the Pacific. This ensures that issues raised will be specific to the Pacific situation. In addition, networking within the region assists in identifying, developing and supporting Pacific people’s expertise and experience. The development of regional skills and opportunities for skill-sharing are another aspect of recognising and nurturing the expert at home. This practice assists in ensuring the acknowledgement and incorporation of Pacific values and cultures in the process of IE.

At the national level, as we have heard at this workshop, many countries are developing or strengthening education policies and legislation to enable IE to become an integral part of the educational framework. For some countries this is at a policy level. For example, the Cook Islanders presented a country report to the workshop participants, which described their IE policy and practice: all Cook Island children with disability are now part of their local school community and receive government-funded teacher aide support. In other countries, projects are being developed to promote IE and then develop it further. In Samoa, UNESCO
and the Samoan Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture collaborated to conduct a nationwide immersion into IE, using UNESCO’s Toolkit for Creating Inclusive Learner-friendly Environments (ILFE). The Toolkit contains six booklets, each of which has tools and activities for self-study to start creating such environments. Some of these activities ask readers to reflect on what their school is doing now in terms of creating an ILFE, while others actively guide readers in improving their skills as teachers in a diverse classroom.

In some situations, there is cooperation between government and NGOs. In other situations, change is being driven by families and disabled persons’ organisations (DPOs). We heard of the exciting and important work of the Fiji Disabled Peoples’ Association which steadfastly advocates and promotes the rights of people with disability (see Chapter 9). The exciting part of IE is that it must happen at all levels but it can start anywhere!

The challenges associated with this issue are:

- to understand the international declarations and mandates and make them work for the benefit of all Pacific children
- to strengthen and develop regional coordination and support networks
- to build the capacity of national frameworks, DPOs, schools, villages and individuals so that all are included in the IE process.

Emerging Issue 2 - Pacific cultures and inclusive education

Another emerging issue is the development of a Pacific understanding of inclusive education. It is clear that the role of culture and values cannot be separated from educational beliefs and systems. The legacies of colonialism have had both positive and negative effects. Educational concepts and practices such as individualism and independence were introduced, but this has had the counter affect in some areas of undermining and weakening traditional beliefs that were interwoven into many aspects of an inclusive society.

In her opening keynote speech for this workshop (see Chapter 1), Emi Rabukawaqa, the Fiji Permanent Secretary for Education, states:

[O]ne of the defining characteristics of modern Pacific societies is their inclusiveness. We are very inclusive societies in the sense that everyone has a place—a traditional role to play in the community—and everyone is expected
to participate in communal life and to have a share in the resources of the land, sea and rivers. Togetherness is our philosophy of life and exclusiveness is an alien concept. ... Indigenous Fijians, for instance, regard themselves as being an integral part of their land or vanua. All Fijians belong to an extended family unit which owns their portion of clan land collectively; and whether they live and work in a town or even in another country, they are included in the structure of their vanua. Vanua is an embodiment of the Fijian world view of inclusiveness.

In Pacific societies, learning and understanding take place not just in a classroom setting, but also through participation in the roles and responsibilities ascribed to each person. Pacific cultures also recognise that gaining knowledge is entwined with sustaining cultural continuity. Inclusive education promotes participatory approaches to learning, just as traditional learning is understood to be participatory, practical and useful to individuals and their community. IE looks at the relationships among students, teachers, families and the wider community. Relationships provide a framework for working together in Pacific cultures.

As I wrote on another occasion:

The process of inclusive education is a natural fit with Pacific cultures. It reinforces the importance of working together to share information, to solve problems, to make decisions and to take action. The many roles and responsibilities played by the wide range of people involved in the education process will help ensure the continuing development of a healthy and vibrant school community (McCullough, 2007).

The challenge associated with this issue is to reclaim important lessons and values from Pacific cultures and use them as a foundation for advancing IE by taking on board ideas from the global perspective.

**Emerging Issue 3 - The special education versus inclusive education debate**

One of the most contentious issues and one that continues to be debated is that of special education versus inclusive education. That it is being openly discussed is positive and healthy, as difficult issues must be dealt with in order to promote understanding. This discussion is a necessary part of removing the obstacles to improving our understanding and our practices for educating all of our children.
To date, those Pacific countries that have provided education for marginalised children have tended to focus on children with disability by creating various types of special education systems. Typically, these have followed the models of having special schools for children with specific types of disabilities (e.g. schools for the blind, schools for the deaf) or the development of special units attached to regular primary and secondary schools. This development has certainly been well-intended but it results in maintaining a segregated system that continues to regard the student as the problem rather than the education system. This demonstrates a misunderstanding of how to provide education and learning to all students, regardless of their disability, gender, ethnicity, economic situation or other circumstances that cause exclusion.

For some in the special education sector, the development of IE is seen as very threatening. There is a perception that all of the good work done to date will be lost and that those who have invested time and energy into this area are no longer appreciated. There is a concern that the specialist skills developed will be lost and that the reallocation of expertise from a segregated system to an inclusive one is too difficult. However, many of the teaching methods and aids used in special education are simply good teaching practices that are useful for all students. Special education does not and should not be seen as the only place where students’ learning is individualised, the environment is conducive to learning and materials are accessible. All of this should and does happen in inclusive education settings.

Understanding the history and developments affecting IE can help to reassure and assuage some of these concerns. Certainly, the special needs education movement was a critical factor in persuading many countries that children with disabilities could and should be educated. It brought more visibility to the issue of the right to education and focused on individualised, child-focused models using a wide range of good teaching practices to support students’ learning styles. It worked towards developing close relationships with families and developed teaching methods and aids to make education more accessible. Self-advocacy groups and DPOs have also influenced the development of IE. They have rightly called for education to be accessible to all children in both physical and social terms. Community-based programmes work in the area of early identification, family support and advocacy for the rights of all children to have the same opportunities for schooling. Individually these movements have looked at specific issues such
as teaching technologies or family support or advocacy. IE tackles all of these and more in order to develop a holistic and effective change in educational systems and societal expectations that will enable all children to be in school and to learn in school (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 A multifaceted situation

![Diagram showing the multifaceted situation of inclusive education.](source: Adapted from Stubbs, 2002)

The transition from special education to inclusive education can also be viewed from the standpoint of who has the problem. There is a perception that in special education, the student with a disability is the problem and needs to go to a special place to ‘get fixed’ or at least ‘mended’. The focus is on rehabilitation, therapy and trying to ‘make the student normal’. The student bears the burden of change, not the teachers, school or educational system. In inclusive education, it is the system which must change. Disabled and marginalised students are valued for
their individuality and uniqueness. They are encouraged to learn and interact with one another in a wide range of methods and activities. Differences are explored and enjoyed (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Differences between the special and/or traditional education and inclusive education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special and/or Traditional Education</th>
<th>Inclusive Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and materials are set and pre-determined and used as prescribed.</td>
<td>Curriculum and materials are able to be adapted to meet a range of learning styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher is in charge. Teacher lectures/demonstrates. Students sit and learn.</td>
<td>Learning and teaching are shared by all. Teachers and students learn from one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is the same age or has a similar disability.</td>
<td>Students are all recognised as unique. The classroom may have a range of students, ages, helpers, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom materials are arranged to suit the teacher.</td>
<td>Classrooms are arranged to be learning friendly environments with access to a wide range of learning approaches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are assessed by standardised exams</td>
<td>Authentic assessment is utilised.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These concerns identify a number of misunderstandings about what IE is and what it is not. Defining IE is very important because there must be clear underlying principles that shape practice and process. When special education is used interchangeably with inclusive education it is obvious that there is no clear philosophy that can be used to shape policy and practice. Using terms such as *mainstreaming, integration* and *special units* further confuses the issues. IE must be clearly understood so that all of the stakeholders are working towards a common goal.

To clear up some misconceptions: a special school cannot call itself inclusive on the grounds that it follows the national curriculum. Neither can a mainstream school that takes special needs students and has them taught by one teacher who has learned to sign and accommodate specific communications systems. IE is about systemic change at all levels: students, families, teachers, principals, school communities, policy-makers, decision makers and society at large. IE is not just
an extra set of skills used to assist students with disability. It is about changing our world to be welcoming and humane to all.

In the Pacific, IE is not only a sensible approach due to its values-based philosophy, but also it suits the economic and geographic challenges that are a reality for many countries. In some rural or remote areas, there is only one school and learning community. Inclusive education is the sensible, practical and only way to educate all of the children in those communities. Special education schools are typically located in urban areas and are not accessible to those living far from these centres.

The most critical issue facing Pacific countries is coming to terms with the role of current systems (often a special education system) and learning and taking from those experiences to contribute to the process of IE. It will mean that ministries of education, schools, families and civil society must all take part in the transformation process of moving towards IE.

In the UK, the Centre of Studies on Inclusive Education, an NGO, published the *Index for Inclusion* by Booth and Ainscow. As soon as the Index was launched in 2000, the British Government placed the document in every school and local education authority in England. Later the Welsh Assembly did the same for Wales. Translations and adaptations of the Index began in 2000, and the number has grown regularly ever since.

According to Booth and Ainscow (2000), inclusion in education involves:

- Valuing all students and staff equally.
- Increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools.
- Restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality.
- Reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorised as ‘having special educational needs’.
- Learning from attempts to overcome barriers to the access and participation of particular students to make changes for the benefit of students more widely.
• Viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than as problems to be overcome.
• Acknowledging the right of students to an education in their locality.
• Improving schools for staff as well as for students.
• Emphasising the role of schools in building community and developing values, as well as in increasing achievement.
• Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and communities.
• Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

At its worst, the defense of special education can develop into a siege mentality of protecting something just because there is fear of change. For some involved in special education, the segregation process has meant that they feel out of touch with mainstream schooling and are concerned that they, as teachers, educators and principals, may not fit into a new way of learning and teaching. They will require in-service training and regular opportunities to discuss their progress with other teachers. They will have much to offer if given information, mentoring and support. Teacher training at all levels is crucial to the successful implementation of an IE system. Teacher training institutions will need to provide students with information and skills for teaching in participatory, cooperative and learning-friendly environments. Resources both, human and technical, will need to be developed as well. All of these are possible and important.

I reiterate, school communities in the Pacific need only to look at their traditional values and they will find that inclusive education is not really a new concept and therefore it should not be an unwelcome one either.

The challenge associated with this issue is to develop a process that ensures a clear and articulated definition of inclusive education, that embraces Pacific cultures and values, is understood and shared, and is implemented for the benefit of all.

Next steps

Where does all of this leave educators, families, out-of-school children and policy makers? What are the next steps towards ensuring that all children are learning in school in their communities? Do we need a working definition of IE and what would be its components? At the workshop, groups discussed this issue. The presentation from a group comprising representation from Fiji, the Republic of
the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Hawaii, Palau and Cook Islands seemed to sum up the general understanding regarding this question. They presented the following.

Yes, we need a working definition of IE:
- so that we have a common understanding of what IE is
- so that we can talk on the same terms or wavelength
- to facilitate discussion and sharing of ideas
- so we can all educate our leaders about the same thing so that they know what they are to talk about at forums and regional meetings.

Key components of IE in the Pacific would be:
- education for ALL
- includes not only low incidence needs but also high incidence needs (e.g. learning difficulties)
- is not limited to those with disability
- includes everyone at risk of being excluded
- caters for diverse learners and learning needs
- is learner-focused
- is focused on assisting students to achieve their full potential.

Key actions and considerations:
- includes partnerships with parents, community groups, government and non-government organisations
- includes trans-disciplinary partnerships
- focuses on mindsets and attitudes
- includes assessment which accommodates diversity and flexibility
- includes multiple means of expression, representation and motivation built into the curriculum
- provides appropriate accommodation for students with different needs
- provides appropriate physical, curriculum, access, social and emotional support for students
- provides equitable choices for families and students
- provides quality education with appropriate funding
- provides rewards and incentives for teachers
- provides support for teachers, including expert and specialist advice, in-class aides and technological support.
As stated at this workshop by Setareki Macanawai, Chief Executive Officer of the Pacific Disability Forum: ‘We need to keep our focus on the child and think outside the box.’

A way forward—the Pacific inclusive education vaka

A strong and valued aspect of Pacific cultures is the relationship with the elements, including the sea. Pacific nations depend on the sea for nourishment and travel to gain information and knowledge from other places. Sometimes an analogy is a helpful way of describing what might be a possible way forward in these often choppy waters. Hence, I have chosen the vaka/waka, as the analogy for the Pacific IE process.

The vaka

The vaka is the foundation. It is solid and seaworthy. It carries our core values and beliefs about our culture. It carries our vision about the rights of education for all children. In our vaka we find respect, community, understanding, learning from and with each other, appreciating our uniqueness and using that to collaborate effectively and harmoniously.

The paddlers

The paddlers are our strength. Strength comes from many places: direction and inspiration from our children and their families, strong and effective leadership within our governments, advocacy and challenge from people with disabilities and their organisations. Cooperation and collaboration are the methods used to ensure a smooth transition towards IE.

The journey

Our journey in our vaka takes us through many seas of change and development. We know that we must continue to develop and improve teacher training. We must continue to develop and implement our legislation and education policies. We need to collect useful information and data so that we can inform ourselves about the directions to take.
The destination
We know that inclusive education is an ongoing journey, so we strive to paddle towards an educational system that embraces and values diversity, that is creative and fun, that is sustainable, and that is a framework for an inclusive, Pacific society.

References


