

Australia's Involvement in Education in the Pacific : Partnership or Patronage?*

Tupeni Baba

The aim of this paper is threefold: firstly, it examines the development of Australia's involvement in education through its aid in the Pacific; secondly, it examines the motives of such aid and finally, it raises issues arising out of such involvement and suggests ways of improving relations which would involve the consideration of the interests of both the donor and the recipient.

The conference theme "Partnerships in Education" has already received some analyses and comments but my own comments will be limited by the perspective of my paper. Partnerships of whichever type - whether they be of equals or unequals - are held together and sustained by mutual interests. If the interests that develop into partnerships are mutual, then they must clearly serve the interests of all the groups involved. If, as in our case, the nature of our concern is education, as against say, trade or commerce, there is an added responsibility on the part of all involved to ensure that mutual interests should not of short term concern or narrowly based, but because of the nature of education should take into account the wider interests of all those involved. This should apply equally to the aid donor and recipient. Similarly, education is often perceived in terms of short term and functional objectives such as the need to provide a labour force for the demands of government and industry. When such is the dominant policy view, other considerations which address a broader and more long term concern, like the development of people's critical and social consciousness are often neglected. It is amazing how effective the advocates of this view have been in the South Pacific and can be seen from an examination of many national development plans in the region. On the one hand, the fact that many such plans have been relegated to the shelf, and on the other, the fact that many such plans of the countries concerned, are indications of the lack of success of such an approach. This is because inherent in the approach is its own weakness : the difficulty and indeed the danger of seeing education goals largely in terms of their market value.

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Australia's involvement in education in the Pacific can be divided into three stages: the colonial, the post-colonial and the neo-colonial periods.

The colonial period

The colonial period began about the second half of the 19th century when the Australian (and New Zealand) missionaries began to take a dominant role in the Pacific. Although initially missionaries of the Pacific came largely from the United Kingdom and Europe, their activities were gradually assumed by Australian and New Zealanders. The Christian churches took an active role in education in the Pacific and as the English and European Christian missionary numbers dwindled, the numbers of Australia and New Zealand missionaries correspondingly increased and so too their activities in the field of education. In the case of Fiji, 70% of all the missionaries that served there during the years 1916-1938 came mainly from two Australian states, Victoria and New South Wales.

Initially, the involvement of Australians was limited to mission schools and extended to government schools which were established later and which took over the Christian mission system, though not completely.

The mission schools were concerned not only with the evangelisation of the natives, but also with attempting to provide an alternative way of life for them. The curriculum was focussed on the type of life the natives were expected to live and included the three R's, the teaching of hygiene, carpentry and agricultural skills and of course the teaching of the scriptures. The medium of instruction was usually the dominant vernacular in the area.

Through government involvement, the focus shifted from a total concern with the kind of life that the people were expected to live to the servicing of the colonial administration. Education gradually became concerned with the training of clerks and public servants with a view to ensuring the maintenance of law and order and public services based on colonial models.

The curriculum also began to emphasise the teaching of the metropolitan languages of the colonising nations notably English, French and German. There was wholesale importation of curricula of the colonising powers which emphasised a shift to more academic learning. The adoption of colonial

curricula and learning became complete when even the external examinations of the metropolitan countries were adopted. All these examinations were replaced much later, after the attainment of political independence of these countries. Even one of the last remaining external examinations in use, the New Zealand University Entrance Examination, was only replaced at the end of 1988. The impetus for change came as a result of a desire for greater relevance and from the decision of the New Zealand Government to discontinue this examination in its own country.

Australia's involvement in education was evident at state level. For instance, the Queensland and NSW examinations were used in Papua New Guinea, respectively. The Victorian and NSW systems influenced those in Fiji, Tonga, the Solomon Islands and Nauru. At the same time, New Zealand became involved in the Cook Islands, Niue, Western Samoa and Tokelau. As the New Zealand examinations, in particular the School Certificate and University Entrance, became widely adopted, New Zealand influence in Education became more dominant especially in the Polynesian and Micronesian islands and later in Fiji.

The colonial period for the countries in the Pacific colonised or administered by the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand came to an end at the independence of Vanuatu in 1978 - the last of the British, Australian or New Zealand administered countries in the region to gain independence or self-governing status. However, the French territories of New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna and French Polynesia continue to be administered by France in a colonial fashion. The American territories such as American Samoa and Guam - both unincorporated territories - are similarly administered by the United States. However, places like the Republic of Palau (Belau), North Mariana, The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Marshall Islands have gained some of self-government, although they are still administered by the United States.

It is an arguable point whether the French or American administered islands in the Pacific are still at the colonial stage, but it is clear that the people in these islands do not yet have full power of self-determination in their own affairs. It could be argued however, that in some of the American administered territories in the Northern Pacific, when some degree of self-government has been achieved, that they are no longer at the colonial stage. It needs to be noted however, that despite the granting of some degree of self-government, matters relating to foreign affairs and defence are still controlled by the United States.

In the field of education for both the French and American administered islands, the curriculum orientation and school systems were clearly dominated by their respective metropolitan powers in much the same way the curricula and school systems for former Australian, British and New Zealand possessions were before independence.

The post-colonial period

In the 1970's when most of the countries formerly administered by Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand had achieved or were in the process of achieving independence, there was a strong desire in the region for education to be more relevant to meet the needs of the countries involved. There was wide recognition of the fact that much of what had been taught had not been relevant and that the examinations set from the metropolitan countries gave little opportunity for the study of local environment, history and culture.

One major response to this imbalance was the establishment of a Regional Secondary School Curriculum Development Project in 1970 at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji, funded by UNESCO. This project was charged with the task of assisting the development of a relevant curricula for the region. The countries involved in the project were those that had been formerly administered by Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom excepting Papua New Guinea.

There was also a strong move on the part of the above countries to establish an examination board for the development of local examinations. This was finally established in 1981 with the use of Australian, New Zealand and UK funds and became known as the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA).

Australia had also been involved with the Morris Commission in 1966. This recommended the establishment of a regional university - the University of the South Pacific - which was set up to meet the high level of manpower needs of the countries in the region. Earlier, Australia had established the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) for a similar purpose. Also at this time, Australia was directing its aid to assist the countries of the region set up institutions and organisations to meet their own needs. In the 70's, Australia and New Zealand directed their multilateral aid to the region for the development of capital and

staffing assistance in order to enhance the capability of USP to meet the needs and demands of the region. Australia did the same for the University of Papua New Guinea and the new University of Technology also in Lae, Papua New Guinea.

In the area of scholarships, Australia provided awards under the Commonwealth scholarship and Fellowship Scheme for the training of students from the Pacific within Australia. In addition, it also provided the Australian South Pacific Technical Assistance Program for the training in Australia of sponsored personnel from the region.

Australia's policy on education at the same time, reflected in the Report of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (Sims 1978) was to give support to education relevant to the needs of the region and to examine the extent to which it could help provide facilities for technical, agricultural, marine, mechanical, medical and social welfare training consistent with island requirements and preferably in the islands themselves. Sims (1978, 4-5) supported the notion that training should be provided in Australia only if practicable in the islands.

"Training should be provided in Australia only when not practicable in the islands. The Committee welcomes regional co-operation in education particularly the establishment of university extension centres by the University of the South Pacific in the Islands outside Fiji. The Committee supports the proposed Board of Education Co-operation (sic) and recommends that Australia should be prepared to assist if requested in this area."

Commenting generally on Australian development and assistance, the Sims report said: "... it is the committee's view that all Australian development assistance must be implemented in such a way that it provides maximum benefit to the peoples of the South Pacific." (Sims 1978, 4).

The views of the Sims Committee on this matter was endorsed by another committee, the Education and Training Mission to the South Pacific, which was set up by the Australian Development and Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) in 1981 headed by Mr C.E. Terrell, the Assistant Secretary of Development and Training Board of AIDAB. The Terrell Mission reiterated the need to support self-reliance of the countries of the region and decrease their independence on expatriate personnel. In doing this, the Mission said:

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"Australia should recognise the regional role of USP of encouraging countries of the region to make maximum use of its facilities and generally limit opportunities to study in Australia to areas in which USP is unable to offer a service or in respect of which there is a particular need outside the region." (AIDAB 1981, 17)

The Mission noted the development of a number of national tertiary institutions in the region and suggested that those institutions should be used whenever appropriate and that a third country training award scheme be set up to facilitate and rationalise the training of people in these institutions. This meant that if scholars were interested in studying in an institution within the region e.g. The Fiji School of Medicine in Fiji, the University of Papua New Guinea, Atenisi Institute in Tonga, they should be able to do so with these awards.

Shortly afterwards, the Australian Government in 1984 set up another committee to review the whole of Australia's aid programme. This committee was headed by Mr R.G. Jackson and its recommendations overturned Australia's earlier policy towards the development of self-reliance with its neighbours and recommended policies dominated by the self-interest in the use of Australian aid.

Neo-colonialism

This period began in the mid 80's with the coming out of the Jackson Report. Although the Jackson Committee directed its attention to the whole question of Australian aid, there were specific recommendations relating to the South Pacific which reflected Australia's self interest in the region.

It is interesting to note however, that the Jackson Committee's stated philosophical position with respect to aid and development is difficult to fault until one begins to examine the specific recommendations of the Committee, The Report for example states:

"The overriding thrust of aid policy is development, indeed aid has become synonymous with development assistance. Sustained development is dependent on growth with equity. Without growth there can be little redistribution. Without equity, growth does not lead to development. If the majority of the population does not benefit, the impetus for development is lost: growth trickles away into sand. To be effective, aid policy should be focussed on helping developing countries achieve growth, that alleviates poverty and improves income distribution." (Jackson Report 1984, 3).

The Jackson Committee supported the concept of equity and the need to ensure that aid benefits the majority of the population but on the other hand, it undermined in its recommendations, at least in education, the need to support the concept of self-reliance among the island countries of the region. For example, it recommended an open policy in the number of overseas students entering Australia. Also, it favoured the use of bilateral aid for sending students to Australia and recommended the strong involvement of Australian Colleges of Advanced Education and Technical and Further Education (T.A.F.E.) institutions in this regard.

At the same time, the Jackson Committee (1984, 48-49) was not happy with multilateral aid and it recommended that it be held at the 25% level of Australia's total aid budget. This took place at a time when there was a steady increase in bilateral aid - an increase from \$US49 million between the period 1969/70 and 1982/83. This represented an increase from 1% to 9% of Australia's total aid. The Jackson Committee's recommendations laid the basis for the direct involvement of Australian institutions with education projects in many of the countries of the region with the use of increased bilateral aid. This led to the so-called "Academic Buccaneering" described in a recent paper (Baba, 1987) where there was a 'fast buck' to be made. For some Australian institutions the activities took up the 'slack' where there had been major decreases in student numbers. The educational projects that were funded in this way could easily be done by staff of the University of the South Pacific through its Institute of Education and School of Humanities (formerly School of Education). But this was not the policy of AIDAB following the Jackson Report, despite the fact that 70% of the staff of USP were from the region and who had built over the years considerable expertise in the kinds of activities being funded (Report of Vice Chancellor to the University Council, USP 1989). The net effect of this was the undermining of USP and its regional capability and the creation of greater dependence on Australian institutions. Even in areas where Australia had been

involved in multilateral projects in education, as with the World Bank project in the Solomon Islands involving millions of dollars, it had made sure of the involvement of its own academic and related personnel in activities which could easily be handled by academics and professional staff in education from the South Pacific region.

The current policy of 'the sale of education' as an item of trade in the markets of Asia and the Pacific, is designed to further enhance Australia's investment by drawing resources from its neighbours. According to the Minister for Trade in Australia at least A\$100 million could be made from it. This certainly could be regarded as a 'fast buck' and a big one at that, but at what cost? The words of the Minister (Dawkins, 1985) are equivocal when he says:

"The point is that we have a valuable product for which there is an overseas demand. If overseas individuals, organisations or governments are willing and anxious to buy that product - and if it does not entail a diversion of resources away from Australian students - why should we deny them our expertise in this area. And surely charging for the service is preferable to providing it free of charge - that would indeed be to divert scarce resources from Australian students."

The two aspects of the above policy involve first, the "sale" of education programmes by Australian institutions abroad and second, the attraction into Australian institutions of full-fee paying students. This will have major implications not only for the nature of tertiary institutions in Australia but also on the nature and viability of tertiary institutions in Asia and the Pacific.

Moreover, it will have a destabilising effect on the long-term relations of the countries in the region and Australia.

What type of relationship?

It is obvious from the recent changes in Australia's policies that primary consideration is given to the benefits that might accrue to Australia in its dealings with its island neighbours. The use of Australian aid funds to sponsor students to study in Australian institutions, irrespective of whether these courses are available in tertiary institutions in the Pacific, will undermine the viability of Pacific institutions. Also, the use of Australian bilateral aid funds exclusively to fund Australian academics to carry out consultancies in the Pacific region which can easily be done by Pacific scholars and academics will

not only undermine the standing of such scholars and academics in the eyes of their governments but will also deprive the Pacific Islands of the considerable expertise their own local people have in many critical areas.

In addition, the requirement that Australian funds be used towards the purchase of Australian materials, equipment and technology will tend to encourage the use of inappropriate materials and technology. This will discourage the use of more appropriate local alternatives.

It is obvious in my view that the kind of relationship that has been struck is one-sided. It has been devised to meet Australian needs and interests. This type of relationship can be described as paternalism and not partnership.

It is of utmost importance both to Australia and the Pacific islands to develop a relationship based on mutuality and partnership. This would have been a natural outcome of the pre-Jackson or the Post-Colonial policies in this area. It would require the use of aid to support regional tertiary institutions. It would also require most awards for Pacific Islanders funded through Australian aid to be tenable in Pacific Institutions except in cases where the courses are not available locally or involve some specialised and postgraduate areas. Various restrictions attached to the use of aid funds which require the use of Australian institutions for consultancies need to be relaxed to allow Pacific institutions and personnel to be used substantially. Other restrictions relating to preference of Australian materials and technology also need to be relaxed to encourage the use of more relevant local resources and materials.

Last but not least, a major attitude change needs to be encouraged whereby Australia treats its island neighbours as partners in development and not as 'former colonial possessions' (Hasluck 1965) or objects of exploitation.

Conclusion

In the past, Australia developed and upheld for some time a genuine partnership with its neighbours in the Pacific. It had an enlightened policy of helping the Islands meet the problems they regarded as important to themselves. At the same time it enhanced the capability of the Islands, through the use of their own organisations to be more self-reliant. However, there is a grave danger that Australia's recent policies will set at risk that partnership which has worked for

so long and led to the mutual benefit of both Australia and the countries of the region.

The words of Sir Paul Hasluck (1965) remind us of the hopes and challenges that we need to bear in mind always in these matters when he addressed a gathering of Australian professional educators some twenty years ago:

"My hope for my fellow Australians is that we may lift ourselves out of the past into the present to look at our neighbours as they are, not former "colonial possessions", not romantic heroes of liberation, but as neighbouring nations, now independent as we are and to help them face up to the responsibilities and the urgent demands of surviving and developing."

Sir Paul (1965, 16) added pointedly:

"I suggest that if this educational effort is to prove of lasting value it will not be because of the skills we give but of the ideas and the understanding that we can promote."

I personally feel that these sentiments have even greater relevance and significance today than at that time, as many of the South Pacific Nations are engaged in developing their identity and sense of nationhood, and at the same time increasingly realising the need for 'mutuality' in their partnership with their neighbours be they large or small. They would not therefore readily accept a one-sided approach or an unequal relationship when it comes to aid and development.

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