

**Introduction and Recommendations: Extracts from *Tree of Opportunity: Re-thinking Pacific Education*, the edited papers presented at a Colloquium on Re-thinking Pacific Education**

**Introduction**

In April 25-27, 2001, a Colloquium on *Re-Thinking Pacific Education*, funded by New Zealand, through NZODA, and hosted by the Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific, became the first joint activity undertaken under the umbrella of the MOU signed between the University and Victoria University, Wellington. It provided the opportunity for a select group of Pacific educators, 19 in all, who have already begun the process of interrogating the values, assumptions and beliefs underlying formal education and development, to share, debate and reflect on what they believe to be the main issues and challenges in Pacific education today and to begin exploring new directions and alternatives in education and development, which might prove more meaningful to Pacific people.

The Colloquium began with the assumption that the 30 years or so of extensive reforms in Pacific education and significant investments by national governments and donor agencies have largely failed to provide the quality human resources needed to achieve developmental goals. However, it also noted that, while educational priority focused on improving the overall quality of education, access to schooling and equity of outcomes, the over-riding issues of what education is, what its purposes are and what the Pacific visions are for Pacific peoples and communities, which should inform the

first two questions, have received little or no attention. Educational reforms have remained largely fixated on improving various aspects of the quantification of education, but there has been little questioning of the values and assumptions underpinning formal education or development.

Research in other parts of the world indicates that to achieve quality education it is not enough to improve leadership, train teachers, revise and renew the curricula, provide adequate support resources, upgrade facilities, widen access, lower costs, mobilise community support, and change the structures of schools and systems, unless the cultures of schools and systems, that is, the values and belief systems that underpin the behaviours and actions of individuals and institutions, and the structures and processes they create, undergo fundamental changes. Some Pacific educators have similarly come to attribute the continuing ineffectiveness of education in the region 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.

**Issues in Pacific Education**

The Colloquium identified the basic issues that contributed to such failure. Not surprisingly, the same issues that have

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

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

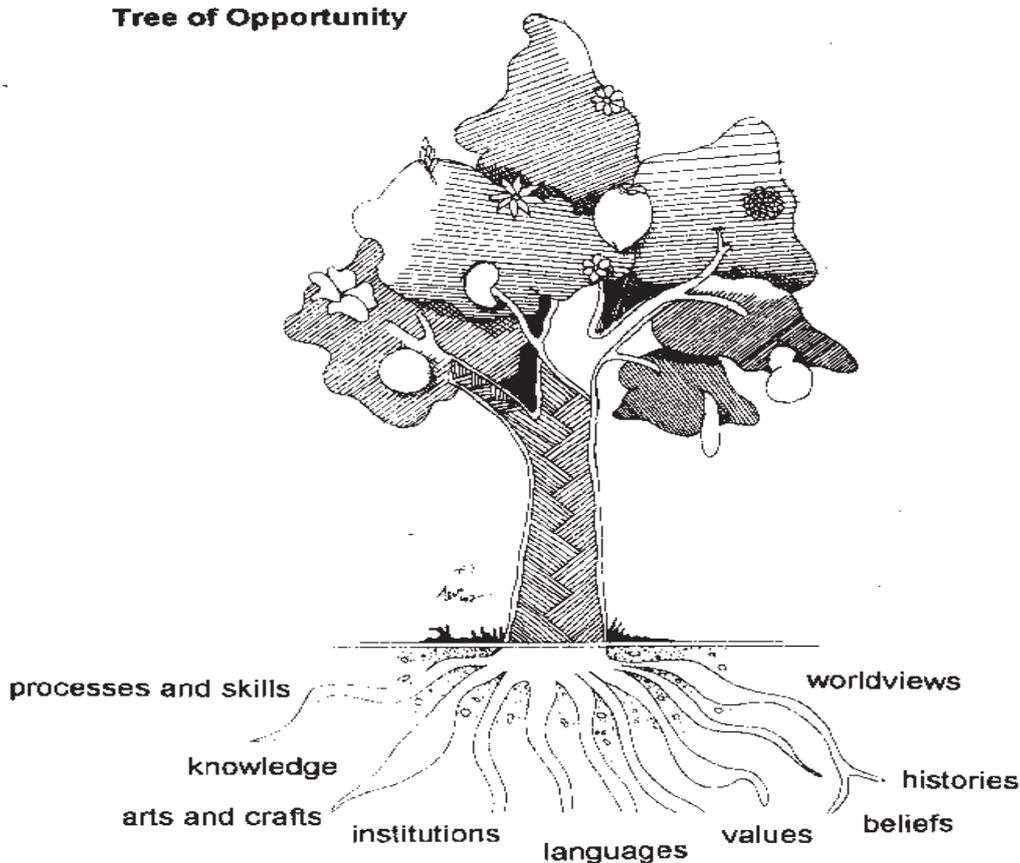
The first is the lack of ownership by Pacific peoples of the formal education process. It was noted that, while the churches have succeeded in becoming fully integrated with the Pacific way of life, education remains an alien process and is viewed by Pacific peoples as something that is imposed from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

The second follows on from the first, and that is the lack of a clearly articulated vision for Pacific people, which could inform both development and education, assuming, of course, that education is accepted as the

key instrument in achieving national visions and developmental goals. Because they do not own the process, educational visions and goals tended to be defined by external sources, as is the case today and has been since the introduction of formal education.

The questions that the Colloquium raised relate to these two fundamental issues: What does education mean in the context of the Pacific and what are its purposes within the formal school system? How do we deal with the alien/foreign nature of schools generally, the curriculum and assessment, the methodology, school structure, culture, and management? How do we prepare all students to be successful members of their societies? What are changes that are needed in education to bring this about? Are we (wrongly) perpetuating western models of education? We are educating for failure — how can we ensure that more/most/all succeed? Children are learning in an alien language. How can we ensure that the advantages to the learning process of their mother tongues are maintained and enhanced and used as the foundation for teaching and learning in English or another language? Education is an expensive process so how can we ensure that education is affordable by all without relying forever on external assistance? How can education take more account of parents' and communities' aspirations? How do we ensure that the village economy is sustained and harmony established with the 'cash' economy? How do we deal with the wastage of the current system, with the increasing numbers of pushouts, dropouts and repeaters? The numbers of school leavers are increasing but job-creation and opportunities are diminishing. How do we address this? How do we build on the achievements already made? What kinds of research and data do we need to assist us in finding answers to these questions?

## Tree of Opportunity



### The Challenge

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

### Recommendations

The Vision of Education, symbolised by the 'Tree of Opportunity' is about survival, transformation and sustainability and its success is measured in terms of performance and appropriate behaviour in a particular context.

As practical steps to achieving this vision, the Colloquium recommends that ...

#### Short-term

##### *National*

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

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

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

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

This meeting is an important first step.

#### Regional

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

#### Long-term

#### National

6. A national vision, which would inform a national vision for education, be debated and defined.
7. A vision for education and its implications for educational practice based on the national vision be discussed and defined with stakeholders, particularly local communities.

8. The proposed model be used as a basis for vision building, dialogue, discussion and debate on education.
9. Strategies and plans be developed to reflect the vision at each level and in different programmes (teacher education, curriculum development, etc.).
10. Caretakers of indigenous knowledge be mobilised, and their support and contributions recruited.
11. Trial case studies with selected local communities be administered and used for on-going development.

#### Regional

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

- iii. Pacific research institutes where they do not already exist;
- iv. the establishment of publishing houses for Pacific writers;
- v. training in research methodologies, including indigenous methods, which must be carried out in all Pacific institutions of higher learning; and
- vi. the active networking of these institutions, including regular meetings, progress reports, and exchanges of data and staff.

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

#### 15. Educational Policy Formulation and Development

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

#### 16. Curriculum Reform

- i. The development of indigenous knowledge, worldviews, philosophies, arts, crafts, beliefs, etc. be supported so that these become integral foundations of the formal curriculum.
- ii. Indigenous pedagogies become a part of all formal education pedagogies.
- iii. The development of vernacular languages as the medium of instruction in early childhood education and primary education be supported.
- iv. Alternative assessment techniques to reflect changes in the curriculum be developed.

#### 17. Teacher Education

- i. Indigenisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes etc. be assisted.
- ii. Indigenisation of curriculum, pedagogies etc. be assisted.
- iii. The status of teachers be raised through education at higher education institutions, and their conditions of service be improved.
- iv. Experts on Pacific cultures be accorded status.

#### 18. Financing Education including, Foreign Aid

- i. Dialogue with and between partners in education be facilitated.
- ii. The use of Pacific peoples as consultants be promoted.
- iii. Minimal strings be attached by donors to aid.
- iv. Existing networks eg. PATE be promoted and utilised to advocate for the indigenisation of education.
- v. Appropriate research on educational aid be undertaken.