

THE PROBLEMS OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC: A TENTATIVE POSITION *

Narottam Bhindi

The topic which has been given to me for this afternoon's discussion is: The Problems of Educational Administration in the South Pacific. Two difficulties immediately must be brought to your notice with regard to the subject under discussion. Firstly, the difficulty of vastness and variety of the South Pacific region which make generalization a hazardous occupation. Secondly, no region-wide study has been undertaken on a systematic basis to identify the problems and need areas.

Because of the vastness of the area covered by the USP region and some paucity of coordinated across-the-board information with regard to developments in education my approach would be of a selective, tentative kind. The problem/need areas which I am going to identify are based on 3 sources:

- (a) from the shopping list which the regional Directors of Education bring to my Institute Seminar held annually;
- (b) from informal discussions I have had with senior regional educators;
- (c) from the comments made by participants at the courses, seminars, workshops organized by us in the different countries of the region.

In addition to the 3 sources, Annual Reports of the Ministries of Education provide additional insights into problem areas.

From the current shopping list in the educational administration area the following statistics are relevant:

- 6 out of 11 countries have requested assistance with ed. admin. programmes.
- Of this 6, 3 have called us more than once:
 - * Solomon Islands (on-going ed. admin. programme) throughout the year.
 - * Vanuatu 3 programmes.
 - * Tonga 2.

Our programmes in educational administration are of two types: training programmes which serve as a device for professional development or to meet any specific need areas; and the second type of programme we offer, and which we wish to consolidate eventually, leads to a qualification.

* A paper presented at a Seminar organised by the Institute of Pacific Studies for 15 visiting American educators.

The contents of the training programmes are based on general areas of need/gap identified by the requesting government. Some of these problem/need areas are found in a number of the countries of the South Pacific. These are:

1. Roles and Functions of the Education Officers at District/Provincial level;
2. The Role and Functions of the Headmaster/Principal;
3. Development and Consolidation of Inspectorate/Advisory services;
4. Teacher Evaluation and Supervision and Staff Development;
5. Educators as Change Agents;
6. The Administrator, School, and the Community, etc.

From the shopping list and my discussions, I infer the most critical need area to be the middle-level one i.e. at the district/provincial level and the school level. In this connection, we see the role of the Institute as a two pronged one: competence building and confidence building. In competence building I include the desirable skills, attitude and technical knowledge of educational leadership and supervision. By confidence building, I mean the development of morale and motivation through on-going opportunities for professional growth and self-improvement, discussions, and eventually acquisition of some basic qualifications. In the latter regard, there is a need to strengthen and expand access to opportunities particularly through the distance mode.

Also on the basis of current realities, needs can be identified in the following areas for which appropriate programmes would have to be prepared and offered:

- **Project Management.** This will assume increasing importance as aid from agencies and metropolitan governments grow in volume.
- **Testing and Evaluation in the Classroom.** This will become a critical area of need as search for more appropriate ways of teaching and learning gathers momentum and the function and objectives of the current testing and evaluation techniques begin to be questioned.
- **Institutional Planning and Resource Management:** With competing demands from other sectors in the economy the size of the cake for education would either remain constant or decrease. Prioritization of needs and prudent management of resources would make institutional planning and accountability critical skills for the educational administrator.

With regard to our training programmes, the main target groups by countries are:

Country	Present	Future
Solomon Islands	Provincial Education Officers	Headmaster and Principals
Vanuatu	District Education Officers/Advisors	Headmasters and Principals
Tuvalu	Headmasters/Advisors	Headmasters/Advisors
Tonga	Principals/Inspectorate	Principals/Inspectorate
Western Samoa	Principals/Inspectorate	Principals/ Headmasters/ Inspectorate/ Tertiary Institutes
Kiribati		Headmasters/Principals

Another area of need/problem is the preparation/training of senior educational administrators in the region. Our education systems are undergoing considerable change which has implications for the senior educational administrators who serve at the various critical levels. It is my view that their preparedness to handle new and changing circumstances has not kept pace with the developments in their systems.

If the changes being introduced are to be successful, they would need active support and leadership from these senior educational administrators who make or influence policy and control resources. Their preparation/ training should occur concurrently with other developments and the programme should include clarification of roles, and tasks, and upgrading of skills needed to perform these tasks effectively.

As mentioned before, the training programmes we offer are aimed at improvement of the current or acquisition of new skills, attitudes, and knowledge. Thus far, these programmes do not lead to any academic credit although much effort is invested by the participants and tutors. There is a growing feeling that they should. This aspect has to be considered carefully since quest for academic qualification can displace the main objectives of training. My own view is that both the objectives of training and qualification are not mutually exclusive. One good example is the pilot Diploma programme we are conducting in Solomon Islands. At the specific request of the Solomon Islands Government, our Institute is co-ordinating a Diploma in Administrative Studies (Education) programme through distance education mode. This is pilot programme aimed towards upgrading the skills and qualifications of senior Education Officers who have been seconded to the newly-established Provincial Governments as Provincial Education Officers. The programme comprises 10 courses spread over 2 ½ years part-time studies. It is hoped that this Diploma or a

variation of it would attract other regional governments as a device for upgrading their officers.

The needs/problems which I mentioned earlier have several factors of which the most prominent ones, in my opinion, are:

- educational reform
- expansion in the education system
- localization
- decentralization
- upgrading and promotion
- need for on-going refreshment

There are others which have to be considered in terms of demographic realities:

- distance and isolation
- communication problems
- size

It must also be recognized that sometimes needs/problems are generated or created because funds are available from some source or because of the desire to emulate work being done in the neighbouring countries.

The sources of the need/problem areas by countries might be summarized as follows:

Solomon Islands: a) Localisation, expansion and consolidation of the primary and secondary system.

b) decentralization of the governance: i.e. Provincial System of Government.

c) changing structure of education.

Vanuatu: a) Localization.

b) the integration of the two colonial systems into a ni-Vanuatu system of education.

c) movement towards a decentralized governance structure.

d) changing structure and content of curriculum, quality of teaching, etc.

Tonga, W. Samoa: Professional development of Heads of Schools, and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the advisory systems.

Tuvalu: Localization.

Professional development of Headteachers and Education Officers attuned to a community-based education system.

Because of the keen demand for programmes in educational administration, a proposal for the Training of Trainers course is under

consideration by our Institute. This programme hopes to train officers identified by regional governments to produce and conduct base-line courses in educational administration. The course has 3 aims:

1. To train selected local officers in the region to prepare and conduct base-line training courses in educational administration.
2. To enable the trainers to serve as local tutors for credit-worthy educational administration courses mounted through the Extension.
3. To enable the trainees to serve as Associate Directors for in-country courses, programmes, and workshops organized by the Institute.

We are proud of our modest achievements and of the contributions we have been able to make through our training programmes in educational administration. We feel we can do more and better but for this we would need to consolidate 4 main areas. These are:

- Finance for staff and participant travel, attachments, visits, etc.
- Materials for training and materials for distribution to educational administrators to encourage their own professional growth and development.
- Collaboration opportunities with visiting academics and trainers to mount additional programmes particularly through the distance mode.
- Research opportunities to find out needs and problems on a more systematic basis.

In some of the areas of need, particularly at the school level we also need to operate on a more integrated basis towards problem-solving. More often than not, problems of administration are inter-twined with that of curriculum, teacher education, evaluation, etc. so that changes in one sector have effect on and ramifications for other sectors. It is my belief, therefore, that a team-based, integrated and co-ordinated effort would produce better outcomes and impact than a one to one, subject by subject approach. But, the approach I am advocating would cost more money and would need considerable forward planning; however, I do not see that we can avoid it any longer if we wish to make meaningful impact on the educational development in our region.