The Pacific Area Technology and Health Project (PATH) - School-Based HIV/AIDS Education in the South Pacific Region*

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The Pacific Circle Consortium is developing a pilot project in the South Pacific Region focusing on school-based HIV/AIDS education programs. The article describes the development of the project and some future directions which would involve collaboration between Pacific nations.

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Introduction

In 1989 the Australian Education Council requested Pacific Circle Consortium (PCC) involvement in the growing area of technology education. Subsequently five projects commenced. At the Auckland Workshop of the PCC in May 1989, the Tasmanian Department of Education and The Arts took on the development of the Pacific Area Technology and Health Project (PATH) which was to link health and technology.

Since 1987, health education has been a major curriculum focus in Tasmania, with a three-year implementation phase using the ‘train the trainer’ model. From 1991, all Tasmanian schools and colleges must offer health education programs. Tasmania also has particular responsibility for national curriculum activities involving technology education.

Early development work in the PATH Project was reviewed at the PCC Canberra Workshop in May 1990. This involved the exploration of a broad range of possible areas for development of resources and country involvement. However, it seems to be rather an impractical approach and further refinements of the project have taken place.

International AIDS Conference

In August, consultants from Tasmania attended the International AIDS in Asia and the Pacific conference in Canberra. Direct contact with representatives from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) strongly reinforced the view that school-based HIV/AIDS education was a priority in the region.

The UNESCO-WHO School AIDS Education Project in the Pacific had begun in 1989. Prototype materials were developed with subsequent regional workshops held by UNESCO and WHO to prepare countries to establish national school HIV/AIDS education programs. The program is
approximately halfway through (Kondo, 1990).

In October 1990 the PCC Conference in Christchurch faced a challenge. Should PATH continue to have a broad focus or adopt an initial phase with a more specific objective? The PCC members were challenged by a representative from the Ministry of External Relations and Trade in New Zealand to develop more defined strategies regarding the South Pacific region and to consider a specific focus such as HIV/AIDS education.

The first phase of PATH was confirmed as school-based HIV/AIDS education in the South Pacific region. The Co-ordinator was to be Jane Kidd, the State Co-ordinator of Health Education in the Department of Education and The Arts in Tasmania.

The PATH project aims to assist with resource adaptation, development, and teacher training in school-based HIV/AIDS education programs.

Since October 1990 priority has been given to developing a broad national and international network. This has involved direct contact with officials from the South Pacific Commission (SPC) in Noumea, USAID in Fiji, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Fiji, WHO in Fiji, UNESCO in Paris and WHO in the Philippines. All officials contacted have been interested in the PCC and the PATH Project and willing to share information. These contacts have led to the establishment of the project and clear future directions for PCC collaboration within the South Pacific region with these and other organisations and individuals.

South Pacific Commission Conference

At the Ministerial Conference of the South Pacific Commission in Noumea in October 1990, South Pacific leaders urged regional governments to educate people on the danger of AIDS. A WHO official also told Ministers of the twenty-seven nations and territories represented to move quickly to ensure that the regional HIV/AIDS problem did not explode into a fully-fledged epidemic.
The Bishop of Tonga, Patelisio Finau, and the Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific, Konai Helu-Thaman, joined the WHO official in warning of the potentially disastrous socio-economic effects of AIDS.

They stressed the need to organise a campaign to educate the public on the dangers of acquired immuno deficiency syndrome (AIDS), a fatal disease which breaks down the body’s immune system.

The South Pacific Commission AIDS Fact Sheet reports 63 cases of AIDS in the Pacific Island region and 213 cases of HIV (November 1990).

Priorities in Australia

Within Australia, the National HIV/AIDS strategy has as one of its goals the initiation and participation in international programs consistent with Australia’s health, development and foreign policy objectives.

Currently both the Inter-governmental Committee on AIDS (IGCA) established by the Australian Health Minister’s Advisory Council (AHMAC) and the Australian National Council on AIDS (ANCA) have a strong interest in both school HIV/AIDS education and HIV/AIDS programs in Asia and the Pacific regions.

Early in 1991, the Australian Directors-General and Directors of Curriculum agreed to recommend national curriculum activity in the area of health education (including HIV/AIDS) to the Australian Education Council which is the established council for the eight states’ and territories’ Ministers of Education.

The focus for the PATH Project seems to be educationally, economically and politically appropriate from both national and international perspectives.

Throughout the development of the PATH Project, officials from the Ministry of External Relations and Trade (New Zealand) and the
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia), and the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) have provided advice, interest and support.

The Department of Health in Tasmania has been a further source of support. The Department believes that collaboration with the South Pacific region involving governments, health officials, agencies and schools is already benefiting, and would increasingly benefit, Tasmania.

The Theme is Evaluation

The PATH Co-ordinator will attend the 13th Regional Conference of Permanent Heads of Health Services in Noumea from 11-15 March to present an information paper on the PATH project. This is a technical meeting held by the South Pacific Commission where twenty-seven member countries are represented. The theme is: Is our Health Message getting through? Evaluating our Health Prevention Initiatives. Observers from appropriate international, regional, national and non-government organisations are invited.


The World Development Report describes two main strategies to address poverty:

* Promotion of the productive use of labour

* Provision of basic social services to the poor such as primary health care, nutrition and primary education

The report stresses that programs must be designed for the specific needs of poor people and involve them at every stage in the process.
Countries are classified according to their gross national product (GNP) which includes a definition of low, middle and high socio-economic status. The report notes that this classification does not necessarily reflect development status.

Measures such as GNP do not involve dimensions of welfare - for example health, life expectancy, literacy and access to public good or common property resources. Thus the consumption-based poverty measure is supplemented with others such as nutrition, life expectancy, under-five mortality and school enrolment rates. It is noted that women are often very severely disadvantaged (The World Bank, 1990).

In contrast, the Human Development Report released by the United Nations Development Program (1990) introduces a new measurement, the Human Development Index (HDI), intended to be supplementary to GNP data. The concept of 'human development' is broader, with its dual focus on human capabilities through leisure, work and political, social and cultural activities.

The Human Development report states that growth in GNP is absolutely necessary to meet all essential human objectives, but how this growth translates or fails to translate into human development in different societies must be studied. The report lists 130 countries, including Papua New Guinea, according to their ranking on the Human Development Index. Another thirty-two countries with populations under one million are listed separately with fewer data; these include Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Fiji. The data available for these countries include only: life expectancy, adult literacy rate, daily calorie supply, percentage of population with access to health services and safe water, and GNP per capita.

The Development Program aims to make future editions of the report more comprehensive, and to include a separate male and female Human Development Index for each nation (United Nations Development Program, 1990).
One implication of the Human Development Index, noted by Elizabeth Reid, the Program Director of UNDP's Division of Women, when launching the Report in Australia (Hill, 1990) was that vulnerable groups should be targeted. Involvement in female education and literacy is known to lead to the highest return, both social and economic, yet this information has not been acted on by governments. (Hill, 1990)

**HIV/AIDS Globally**

Globally, heterosexual transmission of HIV is the predominant mode, particularly because of the large numbers of HIV-infected persons in sub-Saharan African countries. Of the global total of eight million infections, over a third (three million) are women, most of whom are of childbearing age. Again, most (more than 2.5 million) are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Worldwide, by the year 2000, the annual number of cases in women will begin to equal the cases in men. HIV/AIDS programs need to develop education and public health measures specifically aimed at women.

A recent Working Paper, *The quality of education in the South Pacific*, by Throsby and Gannicott (1990) offers more specific conclusions on appropriate general education strategies relevant to this project:

* There is a need to improve the quality of teaching inputs: raising teachers' education standards, improving their status and providing targeted inservice training programs;

* Expenditure on basic teaching materials such as textbooks is likely to be very cost-effective;

* The mother tongue should be used, especially in elementary education;

* Curriculum reform should focus on flexibility and adaptability to local conditions. (Throsby & Gannicott, 1990)
These findings are consistent with the advice coming from organisations within the South Pacific region; they reinforce the perception that small-scale well-funded projects - based on collaboration and carefully building on current programs - are needed.

WHO and UNESCO are organising a curriculum work-shop for primary and out-of-school youth in July 1991 in Suva.* Attendance at this workshop will enable PCC members to be involved in resource development and to meet and discuss possible pilot projects with regional representatives.

References


UNESCO (1990) UNESCO Review Australia No 18, November.

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*Editor's Note: The July 1991 Workshop did not actually take place.*