CURRICULUM ENRICHMENT, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT:
A THREE-LEGGED STOOL

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I deem it a privilege to be invited to speak at the VIII Pacific Science Inter-Congress and wish to commend the organising Committee for their untiring efforts, spanning over several months to make this get together possible. The issues discussed, we hope, will not only be beneficial to the participants but also have an impact on reinventing education to prepare our children for the 21st century.

Education is the right of every child and it is the only hope for the future of mankind.

Therefore, the kind of society our children will inherit will be dependent on the quality of education they receive now. In other words, education could be used as a vehicle to shape individual destinies and that of the nation they will live in. It is indeed tall order but achievable.

Having made those preliminary remarks, I shall concentrate my views on the subject of curriculum enrichment, teaching and assessment as a three-legged stool in the teaching and learning process.

Curriculum enrichment is absolutely vital and has to be a dynamic process to be meaningful in any educational system. As we are aware that no matter how good the curriculum material is on paper and whatever theory or rationale that led to its development, the teacher makes the difference and plays a critical role in making the curriculum come alive in the classroom.

It is also noteworthy that curriculum enrichment cannot take place in isolation or in a vacuum without the involvement of classroom teachers.

It is important at this stage to define the word curriculum. It comes
from the Latin root meaning race course and it is literally interpreted by many teachers just as a race to run to reach a final point. And yet there are other views. One of them is that curriculum is a guide or a plan for learning in an educational setting. The development of this guide evolves from the purposes and aims of education, identifying goals and objectives and then selecting a design and writing a plan for implementation. The enrichment of curriculum means giving it a greater value, like the icing on a cake, by putting life into the overall education process.

The most important decision a school makes is what to teach. This is a critical and demanding issue and encompasses two main aspects. One is the visible curriculum and the other the invisible. The visible curriculum is the academic content, meaning the standard written and spoken English, Mathematics, Sciences, History, Geography, Accounting, Economics, Technical subjects, etc. The invisible curriculum is the school’s expectations about students’ behaviour, honesty, reliability, respect for others, courtesy and attitude towards self, others and work.

It follows then that the three components in the teaching-learning processes comprising the curriculum, the teacher and the evaluation method are so critically inter-related that the absence of any one of these will not produce the desired outcome. For the curriculum to be effective, it is necessary to have well-trained, motivated teachers as worthy members of the profession and an evaluation system which can be used as a tool not only to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum, but also of the effectiveness of teaching and the teaching methods.

Examinations play a central role in the education system in the South Pacific nations. The teachers have a pivotal place, either for the good or for the worse in preparing the students for these examinations. For most schools the hardest and most useful task is to ask the first question: What do we want to accomplish?

That will enable the schools to have clearly defined goals for teachers
and students; and these goals have implications - depending on what the priority is. On the positive side, the schools with high expectations that will not tolerate under performance will have teachers and students working together making a genuine effort to attain excellence in everything they do. And why not, because every child has only one chance in life for schooling and that must not be compromised. Everyone is expected to pursue a course of study and everyone is given the opportunity to learn; and everyone is expected to rise above the bench-mark.

The schools must set goals and then measure their progress towards them. The business adage what gets measured gets done is also relevant to schools. The schools should be evaluated with the same productivity focus that is used to measure efficiency in other areas. There should be yardsticks to measure how much the students learn each month or year they are at school. The schools should also be mindful whether the stakeholders, namely: students, parents, the community, the nation, are satisfied with the quality of work being done.

In other words, the schools should constantly ask and seek answers to:

(a) What is the added value of schooling?
(b) What difference does going to school make?

It is an accepted fact that the teachers make the difference between schools. Even though so much responsibility rests on the shoulders of teachers in shaping the destiny of students, it is surprising that so little is being done in-house to upgrade teachers on professional development in such areas as teaching methods and evaluation practices. The meetings convened at schools revolve around administrative matters dealing with day to day problems. It would be ideal for teachers to meet regularly to discuss their teaching techniques and ways of improving the method of imparting that knowledge.
One of the greatest challenges facing education is to choose Heads who can lead. The Head Teacher/Principal is the individual with the greatest influence over the success (or failure) of any school. These are individuals with leadership qualities who can communicate, who have earned the respect of teachers, students and parents, who have energy and enthusiasm, who can inspire teams of professionals and who can understand problems and deal with them effectively. Professor Bill Maxwell has this to say about Principals and I quote:

"An ideal principal is a father figure with charisma and authority, respected and trusted by all, for wisdom, common sense and humanity, high in profile, a leader of the team, co-ordinator and motivator, equally at home with students, parents, politicians and board members. Such a paragon is not easily found and when found should surely be cherished".

The principal is therefore, the principle teacher. The school is either relatively advantaged or impoverished because of this one person holding the post of Principal.

In other words, an inspired principal can even swim against the tide and reach the pre-determined destination.

Educationists recognise the value of teacher participation in curriculum development and planning. Numerous curriculum plans have failed because teachers either did not understand the design or were reluctant to lend their support to the principles involved.

Stakeholders world over from time to time make reference to curriculum as being irrelevant, boring, too academic and outdated and seek changes. Little do they realise that curriculum undergoes changes continuously. It is a dynamic process and not static. Even with the changes made in the curriculum, if there is no tangible difference in the teaching learning outcome, then it is obvious that teachers have not risen and adapted to the change, thus amounting to pouring new wine in an old bottle. Therefore, for the curriculum to be
alive and meaningful, the role of the teacher has to be many and varied. For instance, a teacher should be a learner foremost and then a curriculum receiver, a curriculum modifier, a curriculum developer and a researcher. As a curriculum receiver, the teacher develops skills of salesmanship with full of enthusiasm to transmit that body of knowledge; as a curriculum modifier, the teacher adapts it to suit the needs of his students; as a curriculum developer, the teacher identifies problems and proposes changes, and finally, as a researcher, the teacher takes the initiative to collect new information to build on to the existing knowledge.

Training institutions must instil these qualities and they need to be followed up regularly at schools in staff development seminars and also in-service courses for them to remain focussed. Those who join the teaching profession have had the opportunity to learn a lot of theory at the University and take courses about how learning takes place in children. The actual experience, however, comes about in the real classroom situation and therefore the tone and morale of the school has to be right for the beginners to apply their theoretical knowledge, may be by trial and error initially, leading to perfection of the techniques. As Stenhouse said

> Improving education is not about improving teaching as a delivery system.

> Crucial is the desire of the artist to improve his or her art.

Unfortunately, leadership in Pacific schools is generally confined to a managerial role rather than broadening it to encompass an instructional leadership position wherein the issues of curriculum and classroom practices ought to become the business of the Head of School. Professional dialogue among teachers will enhance teaching and learning. With encouragement from their peers, teachers will begin to raise issues of concern to them. Stenhouse has this to say on the issue:
"As a starting point teachers must want change, rather than others wanting to change them". Only with that quest from within to change will result in professional development and self-satisfaction.

Unfortunately, there are and there always will be some teachers who will regard teaching as more of a job and less as a profession. The attitude of teachers taking teaching as a task should change if a real contribution is to be made in providing quality education to our children.

Speaking at a Teachers' College graduation ceremony on the powerful influence teachers have on the lives of students, Professor Okeje of Nigeria said:

Indeed, without good teachers we cannot hope to have dedicated and humane doctors, or efficient and functional engineers. We may continue to have telephone lines that are perpetually out of order, erratic power supplies, hospitals that kill more than they can cure.

There is a need to critically analyse the various methods in use for measuring and assessing students' performance. No one can categorically state that any single method is superior to other systems and practices. The various techniques currently in use for assessing students are all valid and the outcomes vary in different situations. What is important, though, is to know and understand that if education is to play its part in Human Resource Development, then a well defined, fair and internationally recognised assessment system for monitoring and measuring the progress and attainment of students is an integral part of teaching and learning. There is no short-cut or substitute for it in bringing out the very best in each student.