

New approaches to the planning and delivery of education in the Pacific region

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Paper prepared for a Meeting of the Board of Directors of Pacific Resources
for Education & Learning (PREL), Palau, 10 - 11 July 2006

At the Pacific Forum meeting in Palau in November 1999 the heads of government discussed the human resource needs of the Pacific, and the failure of many education systems to satisfy them. Schools and their curricula were criticised for not providing relevant life and work skills, for being too focused on academic success in external examinations, and for not graduating young people who could become productive members of their own villages or urban communities. Accordingly the Forum directed its secretariat to bring together the fourteen Ministers for Education of the region, asking them to deal with its concerns.

The Ministers met eighteen months later in Auckland, deliberating on what they referred to as 'basic education', which they defined as all education for children and youth, both formal and non-formal, except for higher education. The Ministers have since met regularly under the aegis of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), and have included the Minister from Tokelau in their meetings. One of their major achievements has been the development of the *Forum Basic Education Action Plan* (FBEAP), a short but important manifesto setting out visions, goals and strategies for education in the Pacific. It is a working document that is revisited and amended each time the Ministers meet. Its vision is clear:

Basic education as the fundamental building block for society should engender the broader life skills that lead to social cohesion and provide the foundations for vocational callings, higher education and lifelong learning. These when combined with enhanced employment opportunities create a higher level of personal and societal security and development.

Forum members recognised that development of basic education takes place in the context of commitments to the world community and meeting the new demands of the global economy, which should be balanced with the enhancement of their own distinctive Pacific values, morals, social, political, economic and cultural heritages, and reflect the Pacific's unique geographical context (www.usp.ac.fj/pride).

A second major achievement has been the establishment of the Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education (The PRIDE Project) and the negotiation of funding with the European Union (EU) under its 9th EDF Pacific Regional Indicative Programme. The EU has allocated €8 million to the Project over a five year period. It is managed by the University of the South Pacific (USP). NZAID also joined as a funding partner with an initial grant of NZ\$5 million over three years. The PRIDE Project was officially launched by the Samoan Minister of Education in May 2004. Its overall objective is:

To expand opportunities for children and youth to acquire the values, knowledge and skills that will enable them to actively participate in the social, spiritual, economic and cultural development of their communities and to contribute positively to creating sustainable futures (www.usp.ac.fj/pride).

In order to achieve its objective, the Project seeks to strengthen the capacity of each of the fifteen countries to deliver quality education to children and youth across all sectors except higher education. The Project therefore has a wide mandate, covering pre-school, elementary/primary, secondary, Technical & Vocational Education & Training (TVET), and the delivery of education through both formal and non-formal means.

The PRIDE Project is quite unique in the Pacific region. Conceptually, it grows directly out of FBEAP, and is the main vehicle for its implementation. The Ministers brought a visionary and innovative approach to Project design, emphasising the need to build educational planning on a strong foundation of local cultures and values. This paper reviews the work of the Project since its inception 2½ years ago, with a focus on planning and delivery mechanisms, and reflects on the experiences of members of the PRIDE team as they work with Ministers to achieve their vision of a more coordinated approach. Key features of the Project are discussed below:

Local ownership

The PRIDE Project was designed and approved by the fifteen Ministers of Education: the process started with them, not with the donors. It was very clear at their third PIFS-sponsored meeting in January 2004, and at their fourth in May 2005, that Ministers saw this as their own Project, and were determined to guide and direct it according to their countries' needs and priorities. Discussions with individual Ministers have reinforced this view. The donors, in turn, have shown quite remarkable willingness to allow this to happen.

Staff of the PRIDE Project, and the National Project Coordinators (NPCs) in each country, have a clear sense of accountability to Ministers. The bi-annual meetings of the Project Steering Committee, attended by Heads of Education Ministries, as representatives of their Ministers, further reinforce this perception.

At this relatively early stage in the Project, any evaluation of the benefits of a sense of local ownership are subjective. The PRIDE team, however, believes that it has led to a strong acceptance of and commitment to the Project in most countries, and generally to quicker decision-making. Staff in turn have a clear sense of direction and are able to maintain the momentum of Project delivery. Overall the Project is ahead of the schedule set down in its Financing Agreement.

Conceptual foundations

The choice of the Project acronym clearly was deliberate, and reflected the wishes of the Ministers. Each country is encouraged thereby to build its education plans and curricula on a stronger foundation of local cultures, languages and epistemologies, thus enabling students to develop deep pride in their own values, traditions and wisdoms, and a clear sense of their own local cultural identity.

This has led, in turn, to a commitment by the PRIDE team to building strong conceptual foundations for the Project. Earlier projects brought outsiders to the Pacific with western 'recipes' for the reform of education. The PRIDE team is committed to helping countries develop their own theoretical foundations, doing so via the creative fusion of their own epistemologies, values, languages and wisdoms with the most useful ideas and approaches of

the global world beyond their shores. The notion of syncretising the best of the local with the best of the contemporary global is embedded at the heart of the Project.

By way of example, much contemporary music in the Pacific represents a dynamic syncretism of the local and the global. It often has equal resonance with those who celebrate and enjoy the traditional as it has for those who prefer modern western music styles. In the realm of education, whether in policy, planning, curriculum or in the classroom itself, the same dynamic fusion can be achieved between tradition and modernity, the spiritual and the temporal, and the global and the local. Young people need to grow up with the skills and confidence to live successfully in a globalising world. Yet it is becoming increasingly recognised in the Pacific that they also need to grow up with a clear sense of their own local cultural identity, built on a strong foundation of their own cultures, languages and spiritualities. How is this being achieved? Let me give a few examples:

(i) Increasingly in the Pacific countries are adopting a bilingual approach, with English and the local languages used equally but separately in the learning environment. In this way English literacy and vernacular literacy are equally promoted.

(ii) A culture of literacy has not yet developed in many Pacific settings. Most local knowledge is not transmitted in writing, but continues to rely on oral traditions, with story telling playing a significant role. School and TVET programs are beginning to value and build on these oral traditions, yet blend them with modern ways of communicating.

(iii) Networks of human relationships are profoundly significant in the Pacific, especially within the extended family and local language groups. Mutuality, not competition, is all important. This is being recognised in some school and TVET learning environments. Group project activity and group assignments are replacing individual learning programs. Peer tutoring also offers significant shared learning opportunities. The ground-breaking *New Basics* curriculum currently being trialled in Nauru provides a fascinating example of a process-based approach that fosters cooperative learning of this kind.

The notion of syncretising the best of the local with the best of the contemporary global is beginning to resonate with educators in the Pacific, and is contributing to a new sense of local ownership and control, both in the planning and in the delivery of education. A stronger conceptual foundation also contributes to a more coherent and holistic approach across Education Ministries.

Strengthening Pacific values

The vision statement in FBEAP emphasises the need to balance education that prepares children for life in a global economy with education that enhances their “distinctive Pacific values, morals, social, political, economic and cultural heritages...” (www.usp.ac.fj/pride). The emphasis on values and morals is consistent with that of the Report to UNESCO of its International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, *Learning: the treasure within* (1996), which argues that education must be based on four ‘pillars of learning’: learning to know, to do, to be and to live together, with each pillar receiving equal emphasis in a child’s learning. In reality, however, the latter two pillars are given little emphasis in most Pacific education systems.

From a traditional perspective, these two pillars, until the colonial era, were a fundamental part of a holistic process of lifelong learning throughout the Pacific. Hopefully global thinking about education may be coming full circle, returning to the moral and the spiritual, and to a more values-based approach. It thus reinforces the significance of the key objective of the PRIDE Project: to expand opportunities for children and youth to acquire the values, knowledge and skills that will enable them actively to participate in the social, spiritual, economic and cultural development of their communities. The Project therefore is working to ensure that ‘learning to be’ and ‘learning to live together’ occupy at least half of the energies of teachers and students in schools throughout the Pacific.

Lifelong learning

The Ministers of Education have requested the PRIDE Project to encourage a more holistic approach to education, with an emphasis on lifelong learning. This is fully in tune with global developments, and has substantial implications. Even though many people say that teaching and learning are simply opposite sides of the same coin, and essentially one and the same, the reality is that education, globally, is undergoing a profound transformation. There is a significant shift in focus from education as the acquisition of knowledge, to education as learning how to learn. There is also a shift from education as preparation for the world of work, to education as a holistic process of lifelong learning.

In responding to these global changes, the PRIDE Project is supporting countries as they rethink their curricula and teaching methodologies. For example:

(i) As the ICT revolution spreads into the Pacific, some students now have access to expansive sources of information that they can access quite independently from their teachers and schools. Teachers have responsibility to help them make effective and appropriate use of this knowledge, to critically appraise it, and to make value judgments of it, often from moral and ethical perspectives. School curricula in the Pacific now need to focus more on developing the critical capacities of students, enabling them to know themselves, to think for themselves, and to become active and confident learners.

(ii) As teachers lose their authority as dispensers of knowledge, their relationships with students change. They need to become facilitators of learning, providing students with the skills and motivation to become lifelong learners. A stronger focus on curriculum process is required: how to teach becomes equally important as what to teach.

(iii) In adopting a more holistic approach to learning, the old curricular and management boundaries between the various sectors of education (pre-school, elementary/primary, secondary, TVET) need to be reviewed, and the question of effective articulation between them addressed. There is a particular need to explore how secondary and TVET curricula might be linked in a more holistic and interconnected way. In the Pacific region, TVET programs need to be brought down into the secondary school, and even to upper primary settings. The seventh and eighth years of schooling are often the last for many students, and it is vital that relevant and meaningful TVET is available to them, and that such programs articulate with subsequent learning opportunities, especially in the non-formal sector. The PRIDE Project is working with several countries to develop and expand vocational programs in primary and secondary schools, and to weave them into the curriculum in a more integrated way.

(iv) As we take a more holistic and lifelong approach to learning, with a broader emphasis on preparation for life as well as livelihoods, questions need to be raised about the deeply entrenched system of external examinations in the Pacific. This system pushes children out of an increasingly selective school environment, with implications of failure and rejection. A truly lifelong and learning-based approach will require totally new models of student assessment. The PRIDE team is committed to working with the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment as it seeks to introduce the idea of ‘assessment for learning’, using an outcomes based approach that aims to empower learners.

Strategic planning

The key mandate of the PRIDE Project is to enhance the capacity of each country to develop effective and realistic plans for the delivery of education. The Project therefore should result in strategic plans for education in each of the fifteen Forum Pacific countries. The Ministers have emphasised that plans should be formulated through wide consultation with all stakeholders and beneficiaries. In the education sector this includes parents, teachers, students, NGOs, private providers, employers and other civil society groups. The plans also should be geared to producing specific results/outputs, they should be realistic, and they should be achievable in budgetary terms.

As required by the Project proposal, a set of ten benchmarks, based largely on FBEAP, was developed by the PRIDE team as a tool to guide the strategic planning of education. The draft benchmarks, along with a set of associated principles and indicators, were prepared consultatively with representatives from all fifteen countries. They were then field tested in the development, implementation and evaluation of strategic plans in several countries, and subsequently revised, again using a consultative process. The benchmarks document has been formally ratified by the Ministers, and has become a key regional resource for the review and development of education plans.

The emphasis on strategic planning at ministerial meetings and within the PRIDE Project has proved to be a significant catalyst for the development of education plans, and almost all of the fifteen countries now have effective planning documents that comply with the PRIDE benchmarks. The Project has directly supported half of the countries to develop their plans. The value of a bottom-up process based on stakeholder consultations has been widely recognised. Stakeholder workshops have been outstandingly successful in identifying the views of families, communities, teachers, churches and local organisations. Some of the best advice has come from consultations with school students. Several countries have included students on equal terms with other stakeholder groups. They have reported that student input has been perceptive, constructive and innovative. The student voice has been quite different to that of other stakeholders, and has added significant value to the consultations.

To support the review and development of national education strategic plans the Project is working in three related areas: data collection and management; financial management; and monitoring and evaluation (M&E):

(i) The collection, analysis and reporting of educational data is a key tool in the planning process. Few countries have an efficient Education Management Information System (EMIS), especially one that integrates school data, student achievement/examination data, and financial data, in a meaningful way. The Project has worked closely with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics to provide capacity building in this area, both through

workshops and on a one-to-one basis with national EMIS managers. A key goal is to build mutual support networks whereby data managers can help each other through the exchange of data collection techniques, methods of analysis and reporting procedures. This will be facilitated if each country has a broadly similar EMIS. Currently the Project is funding the development of an EMIS for the four microstates in the region (Nauru, Niue, Tokelau and Tuvalu), and providing capacity building for staff. The EMIS will be adapted to suit each state, and will be similar to those already in use in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and, in the near future, Tonga and Vanuatu.

(ii) The management and use of financial data in the strategic planning of education is a key challenge for every MoE in the region. There are three inter-related issues:

- *The management of financial data on education*: what to collect; how to collect, store and analyse it; how to integrate financial data with school data and student achievement data; how to prepare clear and functional reports for planning purposes.
- *The use of financial data on education for strategic planning purposes*: how to prepare and use data in the planning cycle; how to cost strategic plans and reform initiatives; how to make longer-term financial projections; how to manage financial planning within the broader framework of national economic and planning policies; how to manage donor contributions within the strategic planning cycle.
- *Linkages between financial inputs and desired educational outcomes*: how to monitor expenditure trends on a regular and systematic basis; how to plan resource allocations to ensure quality outputs; how to link expenditure to specific performance indicators.

In many Pacific nations the education budget is the single largest item of government expenditure. How do we ensure this expenditure achieves the nation's education goals and priorities? To help countries to answer this question the PRIDE Project held a regional workshop in 2005 on the financing of education, especially in relation to education policies, priorities and strategic planning processes. The proceedings were published on-line, and on a CD-ROM is available free of charge from the Project office. The Project also is offering national workshops on the financing of education in 2006 for Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (PNG). Further work clearly is needed in this important area.

(iii) An effective M&E framework is another essential component of strategic planning. The Project has recruited an M&E specialist to develop a suitable framework and methodologies, guided by the PRIDE benchmarks and associated principles and indicators. The aim is to develop a user-friendly framework based on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies that can be utilised effectively, both nationally and regionally, to review strategic planning and implementation in basic education. This should be operational by the end of 2006.

Policy development

In the past, strategic planning and policy development in the Pacific have tended to be top-down and donor driven. As countries have taken responsibility for developing their own plans, and started listening to the voices of stakeholders, they have become increasingly

aware of the need to link planning to the review and development of educational policies using bottom-up processes.

Approximately half of the PRIDE Project budget is available to fund national sub-projects, the aim of which is to support the implementation of key priority areas in national strategic plans. Several countries are using sub-project funding to carry out policy development studies in new priority areas. Both Fiji and Tonga, for example, have identified early childhood education and development as a priority in their latest plans, and the Project is funding substantial policy reviews that will lead to more coherent curricula and staff training provisions. Tonga also has a second policy study in the field of special needs education. Vanuatu has completed a substantial policy review in the field of distance learning. Nauru is embarking on a wider ranging review of policies across its education sector. In all cases the review and development of policy will be based on stakeholder participation.

Capacity building

The PRIDE Project is investing heavily in capacity building to support national strategic planning processes and associated policy development. Several approaches are being used:

- (i) Two regional workshops are held each year in key areas relevant to policy and planning. Five have been held so far. The topics include: educational planning; language policy and education; the financing of education; teacher education; and the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Another is scheduled for later this year in Palau on the role of TVET in secondary education.
- (ii) The outcomes of each regional workshop are being published on-line, and as a print textbook or CD-ROM. The aim is to produce highly accessible resources that capture the new ideas and directions emerging from workshop presentations and discussions. The texts and CD-ROMs are designed for use in pre-service teacher education programs, post-graduate education courses, and as a capacity building resource for teacher in-service programs. The first book was released in 2005 under the title: *Educational planning in the Pacific: principles and guidelines*, and the first CD-ROM on *Financing of education in the Pacific*. Two more textbooks will be released in 2006.
- (iii) The PRIDE NPCs attend an annual one-week workshop in Suva. It has a strong emphasis on capacity building using a train-the-trainer model in expectation that participants will play an active role in transferring the skills they acquire to MoE personnel in their own countries.
- (iv) In order to assist countries with strategic plan formulation and implementation geared to producing specific results, and with realistic budgeting, national workshops are held on request. Local planning is led by the NPC with substantial support from the PRIDE team. Observers may be invited from neighbouring countries, or countries requesting workshops with a similar focus may be invited to collaborate, thus facilitating sub-regional cooperation.
- (v) To further support strategic plan formulation and/or implementation, the Project assists countries by arranging study visits and training attachments, and with the provision of advisers and trainers. Study visits and training attachments allow senior MoE

staff to undertake specific training and/or work experience in other countries of the region. Countries also may request consultants from elsewhere in the region to assist with specific aspects of strategic plan development and implementation. During 2005 and 2006, for example, consultants from Fiji, PNG, Tonga and Vanuatu have been recruited to assist with planning and/or policy projects in Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Mutual collaboration and support

A key aim of the Project is to help countries to help each other. Earlier projects brought consultants from outside the region, and often became donor-driven as they responded to donors' priorities and preferences. When external consultants are recruited and funded by donors it is all too easy for a Ministry to lose control, and for decision-making to be taken over by external consultants operating to tight donor-imposed funding and reporting schedules. In fact, one can sometimes find two groups running a Ministry side-by-side: the Permanent Secretary and her/his staff, and the donor team leader and her/his staff.

To help avoid dilemmas of this kind, and to reduce the level of donor dependence, the PRIDE Project is sourcing most of its consultants from within the region, and already has built up an impressive data-base of qualified people from Pacific nations. It is also funding local educators to go on study and training visits to each other's countries, not to those on the rim and beyond.

Already we have had some significant success stories in developing support networks. The Fiji MoE, for example, is taking a lead role in assisting Nauru to develop and implement a new vocational curriculum in its secondary school, and a twinning partnership has been established between Nauru High School and a secondary school in Nadi, Fiji, that has an impressive record in the delivery of vocational education. The Fiji MoE, through its Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) also has assisted Vanuatu implement a key reform involving the extension of compulsory education from class 6 to class 8, and shortly will assist Tuvalu to implement a new continuous assessment process in the middle secondary years. PNG has assisted Vanuatu in the field of distance learning, a consultant from Vanuatu is currently working with the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) in developing a new strategic plan, and consultants from Tonga and Vanuatu last year assisted Samoa with a major review and planning exercise in the education sector.

Translated from regional to national level, the same approach can apply. Instead of relying on external consultants to coordinate and implement education reforms, the PRIDE Project is encouraging countries to find local personnel, or to recruit their nationals who are living and working overseas, or people who are returning from assignments with regional or international organisations. Additionally, it may be possible for some countries to recruit from elsewhere in the Pacific. Networks of mutual support within and between Ministries also can be encouraged, as well as stronger collaborative networks with NGOs, churches, universities and professional associations, all with the aim of reducing aid dependence and drawing on local resources to the maximum extent possible.

Donor harmonisation

The Project has been asked by the Ministers to foster closer collaboration between donors, both bilaterally and multilaterally, and nationally and regionally. The aim is to avoid duplication and to maximise the impact of donor assistance. At national level the Project has developed good working relationships with donors in almost every country. The development of the Kiribati education plan was a shared initiative of AusAID and the PRIDE Project. A similar partnership with AusAID has been highly productive in Nauru, both in strategic planning and in sub-project implementation. Strong linkages also exist in some countries with NZAID, JICA, EU, ADB and the World Bank. In Vanuatu the Project worked closely with the Education Attaché in the French Embassy, the Director of Pedagogy and staff of IUFM in Noumea, and the Director of the Peace Corps, to deliver a national capacity building workshop.

There has been increasing donor commitment in the Pacific to Sector Wide Approaches (SWAp). Instead of each donor funding a separate project, often in competition with others, they collaborate in a single, jointly funded project. An effective SWAp clearly requires effective donor harmonisation. The PRIDE Project is fully committed to fostering such an approach, and is working closely with several MoEs and their donors to achieve it. In the past there has been duplication and overlap between donor activities, and at other times gaps, with no agency responding to urgent needs. The Project therefore is seeking to help MoEs to manage donor input, and to design effective SWAps.

The implementation of a SWAp, however, will not necessarily resolve all the tensions between MoEs and donors. Challenges can still arise. For example:

- (i) It only takes one donor agency to pull in a different direction, and the entire SWAp can be threatened. The PRIDE team has observed how disagreements between donors can significantly slow down the implementation of an integrated project. It is a risk that needs to be weighed up by an MoE and its donor partners before committing to a SWAp.
- (ii) The constantly changing political context is a challenge in some Pacific countries. It can result in different donors coming in and out of favour, to sudden shifts in education policy, and to conflicts between Ministers and senior MoE personnel. PRIDE staff have experienced this in several countries during the past 2½ years. The challenge is to design a SWAp that is sufficiently robust to withstand political uncertainties.
- (iii) Aid dependence can be a serious challenge to any SWAp. There is a long history of outsiders managing projects in the Pacific. Reliance on them has led to inertia amongst some local staff, to lack of initiative, or to lack of confidence to do the work themselves. MoEs can fall into the trap of allowing decision-making and implementation to be taken over by outside consultants. Donors can fall into the trap of assuming control in order to speed up project delivery and meet funding deadlines. PRIDE staff encourage all parties to plan realistically prior to SWAp start-up, and to put strategies in place to minimise the risk of aid dependence.

Resources for planning and policy development

A key feature in the design of the PRIDE Project is the establishment of a regional education on-line resource centre to provide ready access by all Pacific countries to a wide range of

educational data and planning materials. The PRIDE Resource Centre is now fully operational, both as a hard copy, catalogued collection in the PRIDE building on the USP Laucala Campus, and on-line at www.usp.ac.fj/pride_resourcecentre. The digital collection also has been assembled as the Pacific Archive of Digital Data for Education & Learning (PADDLE) and is available on-line at www.paddle.usp.ac.fj, and on CD-ROM.

The Resource Centre is a unique facility for the region, providing on-line access to each country's strategic planning documents, including national development plans, national education plans, annual education reports, statistical summaries and education policy documents. The aim is to encourage the sharing of best practice and experience amongst countries, and to provide a user-friendly resource to support education planning and policy development. The collection also includes education publications from regional and international organisations, including UNESCO, OECD, PREL and the Commonwealth of Learning, as well as relevant academic research papers. The PRIDE Information Specialist provides specialist research and reference services to MoEs in the region, as well as training in the use of the Resource Centre, its services, and its facilities. The aim is to maximise the benefits that can be gained from the collection, especially in education policy and planning.

Summary

The PRIDE Project seeks to strengthen the capacity of the fifteen Pacific Forum countries to deliver quality education to children and youth across all sectors except higher education. It is a visionary Project playing a unique role the region. Conceptually, it grows directly from the Forum Basic Education Action Plan, developed and approved by the Pacific Forum Ministers of Education in 2001. The PRIDE Project likewise was designed and approved by the Ministers. They continue to view it as their own Project, guiding and directing it according to their countries' needs and priorities.

The Ministers brought an innovative approach to Project design, emphasising the need to build educational planning on strong foundations of local cultures, languages and values. This paper has reviewed the work of the PRIDE Project since its inception 2½ years ago, and reflects on the experiences of members of the PRIDE team as they work with Ministers to achieve their vision of a more holistic, integrated and lifelong approach to teaching and learning in the Pacific.

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