

Academic Buccaneering Australian Style: The Role of Australian Academics in the South Seas*

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The aims of this article are threefold: first, to examine Australia's educational policy in the South Pacific, particularly through its bilateral aid programme; second, to highlight some of the effects of such a policy on the islands' education systems and on the major regional institution — the University of the South Pacific; and third, to examine some of the issues arising out of Australian educational policy in the South Pacific and to explore alternatives which could be considered if the interests of the donor and recipients are to be upheld.

I need to explain from the outset why the word 'buccaneer' is used in the title of the article. Buccaneers were adventurers, many of whom were known to be unscrupulous. They plundered the riches of new lands and their 'natives' and thereby amassed wealth and fortune either for themselves or in the name of their 'king (or queen) and country'. At the same time they extended the boundary of influence and power of their empire. Not all seafaring adventurers were unscrupulous and evil; some were genuinely interested in advancing the welfare of the natives but unfortunately they were also tarnished by the exploits of their unscrupulous fellow buccaneers.

Australia's interest in the Pacific

Over the last decade or so, we have observed an increasing interest and involvement of the Australian government in the Pacific. Perhaps the setting up of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence which was headed by Senator J.P. Sims in September, 1976 marked the beginning of Australia's increased involvement in the Pacific. The report of this Committee recognised the importance of the existing economic ties of Australia with the countries of the South Pacific, and it

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recommended:

that Australia should increase its efforts to broaden and develop its relations to take into account political, diplomatic, social, cultural and sporting considerations. Australia, in partnership with South Pacific countries must work to promote more widespread and frequent exchanges between people at all levels.¹

In the field of education, the Sims Report recommended the provision of facilities for technical, agricultural, marine, mechanical, medical and social welfare training consistent with the needs and requirements of the South Pacific. The Report also endorsed the need for training in Australia when such is not practicable in the islands and it welcomed regional co-operation in education through the establishment of the University of the South Pacific and its extension centres, and also the establishment of the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA). The Report recommended Australian support for these regional co-operative efforts² in education.

Aid and education policies

In 1981, the Australian Development and Assistance Bureau (ADAB) set up an Education and Training Mission to the South Pacific headed by Mr C.E.T. Terrell, Assistant Secretary of the Development Training Branch of ADAB. The Mission recommended:

...that Australia adopt as a major objective of aid it provides to the countries of the region in support of manpower development, the rapid reduction of their dependence on expatriate skilled manpower and their self sufficiency in administrative, managerial and technological expertise in the public sector.³

The Terrell Report recognised the importance of having the above training done locally or regionally whenever possible and it noted the pivotal role of the regional University of the South Pacific in undertaking such training. The Report further stated that:

Australia should recognise the regional role of USP by encouraging countries of the region to make maximum use of its facilities and generally to limit opportunities for study in Australia to areas in which the USP is unable to offer a service or in respect of which there is a particular need outside the region.⁴

The Report recommended that, in order to undertake the above, priority should be given to enhancing the capability of national and regional training institutions to enable them to meet local training needs. It further endorsed the need for giving priority to training programmes that were directly related to achieving this.⁵

In 1984, the Australian government established a major review of its programme through a committee headed by Mr Gordon Jackson.⁶ The Jackson Report undertook a critical analysis of Australia's aid programmes and it came out heavily in favour of bilateral aid arrangements, at least with regard to education, research and technical assistance. In respect of the above, the Report said:

Assistance for education within developing countries should be emphasised in bilateral aid programming. More support should be given to curriculum development and teaching training for primary, secondary, and vocational schools. Support for national and regional post secondary education should be continued with a strong emphasis on the involvement of Australian colleges of advanced education, and technical and further education institutions.⁷

The Jackson Report also recognised the benefit to Australia of having foreign students and recommended that a liberal policy be adopted towards accepting them into Australian institutions.

In emphasising the use of bilateral aid programmes, the Report effectively neutralised the thrust of the Terrell Report which had stressed the importance of enhancing the capability of regional and national institutions and the need to use these institutions whenever possible for training purposes instead of relying on Australian institutions. It needs to be noted that the Jackson Report's strong support for the use of Australian colleges of education, technical and further education institutions came at a time when these institutions were experiencing falls in enrolment and when some were threatened with closure. It obviously would be to Australia's advantage to adopt the recommendations.

The more liberal policy advocated by the Jackson Report for overseas students would make it easy for the islands in the South Pacific to use Australian bilateral aid to send their students to study in Australian institutions. It would also have the effect of undermining the regional and national institutions in the South Pacific both in terms of student numbers and financial support.

The net effect of the Jackson Report was to ensure a greater dependence of the countries of the region on Australia and Australian institutions — an effective policy of neocolonialism. It can be argued that if each small island state is to be able to have a greater degree of self-determination or self-reliance in its relationship with metropolitan countries in the Pacific and on its rim, it would need to rely a lot more on co-operative efforts with its neighbouring islands. For this purpose, the island nations have collectively established over 200 regional organisations and institutions in various fields, including education. The Australian policy as recommended in the Jackson Report undermined such regional efforts.

Before examining specific cases of Australian involvement in the countries of the region, it would be useful to dwell briefly on the shift of Australia's policy towards bilateral as against multilateral aid arrangements. Australia's multilateral aid amounts to 25% of its total aid budget; the Jackson Report recommended that it should be maintained at that level. On the other hand, 74% of Australia's aid is made available through bilateral programmes. There has been a big increase in the amount of bilateral aid to the Pacific over the last decade or so. In fact, the increase from \$US1 million to \$US49 million between the period 1969/70 and 1982/83 represents an increase from 1% to 9% of Australia's total aid. The Jackson Report strongly supported such a shift in Australian aid policy.

Some examples of Australia's bilateral assistance in education

It is not possible to provide here a detailed account of all the projects in the various countries of the South Pacific that Australian academics have been involved in through ADAB, nor is it possible to provide the detailed costs for each project as this type of information is not generally available even to recipient countries. My purpose in including some of the projects is to give a general idea of the activities and the method of execution of the projects by Australian institutions and agencies.

Here is a sample of some projects in Western Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.

- Western Samoa**
- (a) Primary Curriculum Development — managed by Macquarie University
 - (b) Secondary Teachers' College — managed by Macquarie University

	(c) Curriculum Development for Junior Secondary Schools — managed by the International Training Institute, Sydney
Tonga	(a) Primary Curriculum Development — managed by Macquarie University (b) Secondary Teacher Education Programme — managed by Macquarie University
Kiribati	Curriculum Development for Community High Schools — managed by the Salisbury College of Advanced Education.
Solomon Islands	Secondary Education Project on the Training of Junior Secondary Teachers — this was recently advertised in Australia.
Tuvalu	Upgrading of Secondary Education which would involve teacher education (and probably curriculum development) — currently under discussion and consideration.

Most of the above projects take about 2-3 years to complete and they cost up to millions of dollars. The projects are managed by Australian institutions and they hire Australian academics. In many cases, academics are specially hired to undertake the work on behalf of managing institutions and they are released after the project. In other cases, existing staff of managing institutions are used.

It is of interest to note that virtually all of the activities in all the above projects can be done by the staff of the University of the South Pacific and for which, half of the staff involved would be citizens of the countries of the region. In fact, the staff of the Institute of Education and the School of Humanities (formerly the School of Education) at USP have been involved with similar activities in the region, such as in teacher education, curriculum development, etc., for over ten years and a considerable pool of expertise and local knowledge has been built up in the various specialisations of education.

An examination of the activities involved in all the projects would show that they are very basic and they are usually the kind of activities that any School of Education could be called upon to do. This is certainly true of both the Western Samoa and Tonga projects. In fact, the projects on curriculum development would require the heavy involvement of local

teachers and local scholars either in national institutions or the regional university, USP.

The training of junior secondary school teachers in Solomon Islands, Western Samoa and probably in Tuvalu is in line with the kind of work that the USP School of Humanities has been doing. This is closely related to the consultancy work done by its staff and those at the Institute of Education for many years in the development of curriculum at the junior secondary level. In fact, the USP programme for the preparation of junior secondary school teachers had to be suspended a few years ago owing to a reduction in the number of students enrolled. This was due not to the lack of need but more to the lack of funds in the smaller countries of the region either to send their students to USP or to meet the cost of the development of similar programmes in their own national teacher training colleges either independently or in association with the USP. Such an association was developed with two of the teacher education colleges in the region — Western Samoa Secondary Teachers' College and Malapoa College in Vanuatu.

It would appear therefore that the exclusive involvement of Australian institutions and academics in these projects is not because of a lack of expertise or willingness on the part of academics and educators at the University of the South Pacific and at national institutions in the region. It is a matter of deliberate policy.

It would also be of interest to look at the method of execution of some of the projects. Some of the questions that have been asked about this are: How are the projects initiated? Who determines the nature of the project? How are the managing agents appointed? How are the staff selected? What degree of consultation with academics and educationists in the region and at USP takes place? How are the projects assessed? What happens at the end of the project?

Here is an account from a Principal, in one of the small countries of the region, which will give some insight into what goes on at the early stage of a project:

In December '85 Dr X visited my school. He returned again in March '86 with an official and an architect and they produced a physical plan of the school which would cost \$A4m. The plan would cost more than the budget of my

country for any one year. In July '86 a Japanese team visited the school at the request of the Australian government to fund the project... but nothing has been done so far.... I pointed out to Dr X some of the difficulties of filling in for teachers going on training leave. Dr X then came up with a plan for sending teachers to Australia for a year's training and they would be replaced by Australian teachers.

Dr X suggested that I take a visit to Brisbane, Townsville, Sydney and Wollongong.... I did not ask for the visit. During the visit, I met all the important people... and was told that the project would start next year, 1987.... I feel there was a lot of salesmanship by those involved... everything seemed possible. The money consideration was brought up only in the last two days of my two weeks' visit.⁹

There is no suggestion that all the projects started like the one above but from discussions with some of the regional Principals of teachers' colleges and the Directors of Education involved, I gathered that most, if not all, were taken on a similar tour to Australia.

There is no doubt that extensive discussions took place with the nations involved but not with the University of the South Pacific, even in cases where the University has been involved in similar projects in those countries.

The managing agents are Australian institutions, although recently a number of private companies and consortiums have begun to bid for projects and one interesting aspect of this is that some of the former staff of USP who have returned to Australia have now become actively involved in bidding for projects. Some have even set up private companies to undertake such work. The University of the South Pacific is not invited to participate on an equal basis with Australian institutions but in some cases individuals are invited informally at the discretion of the Australian managing institutions to participate in specific consultancies. Where this has happened, the outcome has been very satisfactory on both sides and for the recipient country. In fact one of the most successful projects in the region was the one in Kiribati concerned with the development of curriculum for community high schools. This was managed by Salisbury College of Advanced Education and they involved consultants from the Institute of Education at USP on an informal basis. In some cases, requests for informal discussions with staff at USP by some Australian individuals have been resisted by senior ADAB officials.

Perhaps the fault lies not with individuals or institutions but with the mode of implementation of bilateral aid programmes. Perhaps the island nations are equally to be blamed for not insisting on full involvement of their national and regional institutions. However, this begs the question of whether they have a say in the choice of institutions to manage projects.

It needs to be pointed out that the New Zealand bilateral aid programme permits USP through the Institute of Education to be the managing agent of its projects as in the longstanding Tonga curriculum development project. This is a model that could be explored by ADAB. With greater co-operation and involvement by regional and Australian academics a number of conflicts and difficulties could be resolved.

It is also important to note, while looking at the involvement of Australian institutions, the handling of multilateral aid through the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP). IDP involves the USP fully in all its projects; it is responsive to its needs and problems, and is therefore highly regarded and effective in its aid delivery.

Some implications

It is evident from the above that the current bilateral aid arrangements ignore and undermine an important regional resource base which could have been tapped for mutual benefit of recipients and donors. It could also foster healthy academic and scholarly interaction among those involved. It would be in the long term interest of the countries in the region if the capability of its regional institution is enhanced and consolidated. This would be one way of ensuring that it will be in a better position to respond to regional needs rather than it being required, as has happened so often, to 'pick up the bits' after the overseas consultants have gone home.

I suggest that USP be invited to be involved as equal partners in managing bilateral aid projects in recognition of its expertise and experience as the major regional institution in the South Pacific. Even if the above suggestion cannot be met, informal consultations and the invitation to participate should be extended to USP by Australian managing agencies and bidders. This would only reinforce what is being sought by some enlightened overseas consultants.

The implementation of the above suggestions would at least lead to the following additional outcomes:

1. Costs would be kept low and savings, if any, would flow to the recipient countries.
2. Regional staff would gain valuable experience and applied research in projects which affect the future of their countries.
3. Overseas staff would develop regional contacts and extend their experience in educational development work.
4. Projects will draw from a greater pool of expertise; and
5. Educational aid will generate goodwill and healthy respect amongst donors, recipients and participants.

Notes

1. Australian Parliament (1978) *Australia and the South Pacific: Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
3. ADAB (1981) *Report of the Education and Training Mission to the South Pacific (The Tervell Report)*. Canberra: Printwrite, p. 10.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
6. Commonwealth of Australia (1984) *Report of the Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program (The Jackson Report)*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
9. Interview with the Principal of a High School in a small country in the South Pacific region on 12 November, 1986.