Rethinking Educational Reform:
A Pacific Perspective

**A paper presented at the international conference "Redesigning Pedagogy:
Research, Policy & Practice" National Institute of Education, Nanyang
Technological University, Singapore, 30th May – 1st June, 2005.**

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Introduction

A groundswell of opinion on the critical importance of rethinking education in the Pacific is rising from Pacific nations and their educators. They recognise that their education systems are still caught up in a colonised time warp despite the fact that most Pacific nations have been politically independent for some decades. The issues of control and ownership of the processes and structures of education are particularly important to them. As well, an interrogation of the values and assumptions that underpin formal education is taking place in knowledge sites such as universities. Pacific educators are concerned that the same issues around access, equity, relevance, quality, efficiency and effectiveness that confronted Pacific education three decades ago still abound today despite much investment in educational reform by governments and donor agencies.

For the purposes of this paper, the Pacific refers to the 15 independent countries in the Pacific region[2]. This includes four larger nations: Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands and Vanuatu; seven not so large nations: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa and Tonga; and four small island nations: Niue, Nauru, Tokelau and Tuvalu. From the smallest nation of Tokelau to the largest of PNG, many reforms are being undertaken in an attempt to improve the quality of their education systems.

Using postcolonial theory, this paper analyses the impact of such forces as colonialism, globalisation and educational aid on the capacity of Pacific nations to attain and maintain control and ownership of their education systems: the content and processes of learning; pedagogies of the teacher; organisational structures; management cultures; and approaches to assessment and evaluation. The paper attempts to provide a way forward by exploring conceptual underpinnings that lead to a new approach based on syncretisation of: the local and the global; insider and outsider perspectives; academic, technical and lifelong learning; and the temporal and the spiritual. In rethinking educational reform in the Pacific region, it is important to take a holistic approach. The privileging of a more subjective and spiritual approach to educational reform is the thread that will seek to integrate the paper.

In this paper, I take a 'strategic essentialist' (Spivak, 1990, 1995) position as an 'insider' indigenous Pacific Islander. My treatment of the Pacific region seems to assume homogeneity when this is clearly not the case. I acknowledge the heterogeneity, complexities, specificities and multiplicities of contexts and situations of the 15 Pacific countries covered in the paper. As well, if there are any contradictions or ambivalences, this will demonstrate that there are no easy answers to the issues confronting the Pacific region.

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[1] A paper presented at the international conference on *Redesigning Pedagogy: Research, Policy & Practice* at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 30th May – 1st June, 2005.
[2] Alternatively, the countries can be categorised as Melanesian: Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu; Micronesian: FSM, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru & Palau; and Polynesian: Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Niue, Tokelau and Tuvalu.

Background

The Pacific Region

The 15 Pacific countries occupy a small land area but are sprawled over a vast area of ocean. In total, they cover a little over half a million square kilometres of land, but 19.9 million square kilometres of ocean (i.e., in terms of exclusive economic zones). To illustrate the diversity in land size, Tokelau, the smallest nation, has a land area of 12 square kilometres; Nauru occupies 21; RMI 181; Tonga 688; Fiji 18,272 in comparison to PNG's 462,000. The countries range from atolls such as RMI and Kiribati, where fresh water and vegetation are scarce and natural resources severely limited, to the better endowed volcanic islands of the bigger Melanesian countries.

In terms of population size, a little over two million people live in 14 of the countries. Add PNG's 5.6 million and the total population of the region is close to 8 million. By and large, the majority of people in each country are indigenous[3]. The Pacific is the most linguistically complex region in the world with one fifth of the world's languages. More than 1,000 distinct languages are spoken by less than 8 million people with multilingualism and bilingualism the norm. The dominant religion in the Pacific is Christianity.

Agriculture, fisheries and/or tourism are the mainstays of many Pacific economies. In a cut-throat globalising capitalist world where economic concerns are paramount, the Pacific islands are extremely vulnerable as a consequence of their smallness. They are also vulnerable to the vagaries of nature where cyclones and hurricanes continue to cause untold damage to their social and economic well-being. For instance, the Cook Islands is still recovering from five destructive cyclones that attacked within three weeks of each other in early 2005.

Small island states face many challenges including development and over-concentration, open economies and overdependence, high public expenditure, distance costs, dominance of public employment, problems of finance, aid dependency, and patronage and nepotism (Bacchus & Brock, 1987: 2-4). Small island states are at the mercy of 'developed' nations in terms of economic aid, exploitation by multinational corporations and the vagaries of the global economic system.

These countries, because of their colonial legacy, also face the deeper challenge of decolonising colonial mindsets inherited from centuries of colonial subjugation, oppression and power play. Stepping out of the colonial box into postcolonial[4] conditions must start where it counts most – in the mind. A psychological/mental deconstruction must take place – an interrogation of the colonial past and postcolonial present in order to renegotiate the way to a more effective syncretism of local and global worlds. Pacific Islanders need to find a constructive and practical way to "deconstruct the concept, the authority and assumed primacy of the West" (Young, 1990). They must analyse the insidious effects of their colonial past not with the purpose of criticising or blaming the colonisers but with the goal of transforming their mindsets in order to reclaim or restore the best of what was lost, subverted or ignored in the colonial era and its aftermath.

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[3] The exception is Fiji where a little less than half of the population is Indo-Fijian.
[4] The term 'postcolonial' is a hotly contested one and much theorizing revolves around it. A useful definition is given by Leela Gandhi (1998: 4) who defines postcolonialism as "a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past".

The Colonial Legacy

With the exception of Tonga, the Pacific region has been colonised by various 'western' countries over the last three centuries. The primary instruments of control of colonised subjects were (and still are) written history (texts), education and language. Colonial practices – including the historical, imaginative, material, institutional and discursive – have significantly transformed Pacific ways of knowing, being and doing. The ideological, political, economic and social structures currently in place today are manifestations and hybrid versions of the colonial project. Colonial ways of knowing and doing, together with 'western' values, attitudes and cultural practices, permeate the lived experiences of the colonised to such an extent that they have become part of the postcolonial landscape. At the point of decolonisation, if there is no deliberate effort to resist, overthrow, even transform these colonial legacies, then inherited structures and systems will become normative and hegemonic fixtures of national life.

Because every education system is shaped by its national history and socio-cultural, political and economic contexts, the education systems in the Pacific region are manifestations of their colonial histories. For instance, the educational structures in Fiji are modelled on the British system. Similarly, Palau, RMI and FSM continue to maintain strong ties with the United States of America; the Cook Islands, Tokelau and Niue have close ties with New Zealand; while Vanuatu faces the challenge of dual Anglophone and Francophone systems. The curricula, teaching methods, assessment and evaluation methods, languages of instruction, administration and management models, and organisational cultures of schooling in the Pacific continue in hegemonic forms, usually closely resembling those in place during the old colonial days.

It is not hard to understand why colonial practices, processes, structures and ways of knowing and doing continued in hegemonic ways after decolonisation. Even when countries attained political nationhood as independent states, the colonising impact continued in two ways: first, through the processes associated with neocolonialism, and second through the influence of local middle-class elites, described by Fanon (1967: 36) as vigilant sentinels who are ever ready to defend "the essential qualities of the West". These guards of things western are usually the educated locals who after independence continue to protect and maintain systems and structures inherited from their colonial 'masters'. An example of this is the continuing practice of valuing and elevating English in school, and in the home, above the mother tongue.

Neocolonialism has been defined as "the highest stage of colonialism" where a politically independent nation that was under colonial rule continues to be bound, whether voluntarily or through necessity, to a European or American society, or to a western derivative society such as New Zealand or Australia. It can range from the open distribution of foreign textbooks to the more subtle use of foreign advisers on matters of policy as well as the continuation of foreign administrative models and curricular patterns for schools with very little alteration to the curriculum that was in place before independence (Altbach, 1995: 452).

The most insidious element of neocolonialism is that relatively little change to the education system occurs after former colonies attain political independence (Puamau, 1999: 40). As Ashcroft et al. (1995: 424) put it, "Education is perhaps the most insidious and in some ways the most cryptic of colonialist survivals, older systems now passing, sometimes imperceptibly, into neo-colonial configurations". In the case of the Pacific, educational apparatuses can be described as hegemonic because once structures such as curriculum assessment and school organisation become entrenched and institutionalised, they have a totalising effect on society. Education deeply saturates "the consciousness of a society" (Williams, 1976: 204) and becomes unquestionably what parents want for their children.

Impact of Globalisation

Colonialism is an offshoot of globalisation, a process that started in the 16th century with the first big expansion of European capitalism. Western industrial countries have managed to maintain their sovereignty through the process of colonialism where they amassed great wealth and appropriated many resources from their colonies to run their economies. As Albert Memmi (1965: 149) put it, "Colonization is, above all, economic and political exploitation". After all, capitalism and its worldwide spread through the process of colonialism "instilled in the white men a constant yearning for the material benefits and power which they believed money alone can bring" (Gladwin, 1980: 26-27).

Pacific nations are struggling to keep up with the impact of globalisation, with the rapid increase in cross-border economic, social and technological exchange under conditions of capitalism. In order to survive in an increasingly sophisticated technological world, they need to log onto the information superhighway and keep up with worldwide trends and developments. They must align their development plans to international political, economic and educational conventions and laws. They must play the game of keeping up with trade deficits, and of maintaining national economic systems against the powerful homogenising impact of western cultural practices, the influence of the media and the dictates of market forces.

Educational Aid

Foreign aid, educational or otherwise, can be described as a neocolonial artifact since power relations continue in neocolonial ways. Power and control are maintained primarily through the strings attached to the giving of financial assistance. In almost all cases, aid donors dictate what the countries should do instead of allowing them to decide for themselves how they should utilise the aid. Foreign donors commonly initiate, appraise, assess, plan and impose their value systems, principles and processes on their development partners. "In educational aid projects, a micro level analysis would show that donors often set the agenda for the aid activities, define the terms of reference for consultancies and set the questions for problem identification" (Sanga, 2003).

Foreign aid, described as a "double-edged sword" (Heine and Chutaro, 2003), is such a powerful weapon that no western government is keen to abandon it because it is big business (Gladwin, 1980). In addition, many 'Third World' countries carry substantial foreign debt which mostly comes in the form of loans from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, various regional development banks, and agencies of the United Nations. Given that foreign aid and loans are primarily tools of control and economic exploitation, how can small Pacific island states maintain their sovereignty given their economic vulnerability?

The emergent power of multinational and transnational corporations whose income easily outstrips many 'Third World' economies (Castells, 1996) can be added to this equation. Castells describes the Pacific dilemma quite aptly when he notes that "countries that are left exclusively to the impulses of market forces, in a world where established power relationships of governments and multinational corporations bend and shape market trends, become extremely vulnerable to volatile financial flows and technological dependency" (Castells, 1996: 89).

Foreign donor agencies have driven many educational reforms in the Pacific region. Reforms over the last three decades at all levels of schooling have centred mainly on curriculum development, assessment, teacher education, and resource development to support curriculum change. While a critique of development assistance shows that donor countries benefit most from the aid relationship (see for example Nabobo, 2003; Puamau, 2005b) the benefits of educational aid for recipient countries must be acknowledged. For example, teacher training

assistance has seen capacity building of a significant number of lecturers. Expensive infrastructure such as classrooms, lecture rooms, hostels, libraries and toilet blocks has been provided through aid-funded projects. Additionally, many locals have been employed in aid projects that have included capacity building of local professional and management staff who then become highly marketable on the international stage. Moreover, scholarship programmes have enabled many Pacific Islanders to obtain a tertiary education, including postgraduate degrees. Without development assistance, it is highly unlikely that small island states could have afforded these expenditures given their small national budgets.

However research in the Pacific region indicates that despite reforms in training teachers, revising curricula, providing resources, upgrading facilities, mobilising community support, and improving leadership and school management, quality education still is not being achieved. The same issues that faced Pacific education three decades ago in terms of quality, access, equity, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and student achievement continue to plague Pacific nations. And despite Pacific governments and donor agencies investing heavily in the education sector, the learning outcomes for most students have not improved. In fact, many students continue to fail in schooling at alarming rates.

Very little attention has been given to interrogating curriculum, school culture, structure and organisation, including the values that underpin evaluation and assessment of learning. The "values and belief systems that underpin the behaviours and actions of individuals and institutions, and the structures and processes they create" need to undergo fundamental change (Pene, Taufe'ulungaki & Benson, 2002: 1). The ineffectiveness of Pacific education can be attributed to the "increasing incongruence between the values promoted by formal western schooling, the modern media, economic systems and globalisation on the one hand and those held by Pacific communities on the other"(Pene, Taufe'ulungaki & Benson, 2002: 1).

Rethinking Educational Reform in the Pacific

Given the profound and pervasive psychological repercussions of colonialism and globalisation, and given the increasing pressures to conform to international benchmarks and conditions that come with accepting foreign educational aid, can Pacific people change the 'colonial mindsets' that many of them are still trapped within? Is it possible for them to change the philosophies, ideologies, values and structures that currently underpin their educational systems? Do they have the will, the courage, the energy and the resources to transform their education systems into what they perceive to be best for their people and nation? Can they truly own and control the formal education process? Is it possible to have a genuine Pacific vision of education? What shape should the rethinking of educational reform in the Pacific take? What are the parameters that should guide the direction of this rethinking process? Who decides? Whose voice(s) ought to speak and be heard? What place do 'outsider' perspectives have in the rethinking of Pacific education? These are some important questions that need to be addressed.

The Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative (RPEI)

In any discussion on the rethinking of Pacific education, it is important to draw attention to a groundbreaking and innovative initiative dreamed up by Pacific educators for Pacific people. The *Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative* (RPEI) was conceived by three highly qualified academics whose collective 'insider' expertise and experience in the field of (Pacific) education and educational aid exceeds one hundred years. Professor Konai Thaman, Dr 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki and Dr Kabini Sanga began informal conversations about a new approach to supporting educational development through external aid agencies in December 2000 at the launching of the Auckland University Research Unit for Pacific Education (RUPE). After further discussions with the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID), a

proposal put together by the three key educators that articulated the core concepts, structure and key components of the initiative were discussed and agreed upon (Sanga & Nally, 2002).

The multiple goals of the RPEI are to:
- provide and strengthen leadership in Pacific education at regional and national levels;
- work with educators, officials and politicians to achieve the best education possible for Pacific people, based on the understanding of the critical role education has in preparing Pacific communities for the future;
- encourage Pacific educators to assume responsibility for rethinking their own education and development agendas;
- support research and its publication and dissemination;
- provide leadership in establishing networks and strengthening strategic alliances between donors, educators, government ministers, NGOs, researchers and eduction practitioners;
- facilitate critical assessment of Pacific education by Pacific communities;
- develop a new vision for Pacific education by Pacific communities;
- foster leadership capacity for education in the Pacific; and
- critique the role of donors in supporting education developments in the Pacific.

The leadership and management of RPEI have shifted from Dr Kabini Sanga at the Victoria University of Wellington to Dr 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki at the University of the South Pacific (USP). The initiative has had many positive outcomes since its inception in 2001:

(i) **Regional action**

(a) A colloquium was held in April 2001 for a small group of Pacific educators "to identify issues in education, critique Pacific education and explore alternatives that would deliver more effective developments in education in the Pacific" (Sanga and Nally, 2002). The papers presented at the colloquium have been published in a book called *Tree of Opportunity: Rethinking Pacific Education* edited by Pene et al (2002).

(b) A regional conference on *Rethinking Educational Aid in the Pacific* was held in Nadi, Fiji in October 2003. This was a landmark conference since the major aid/lending agencies, including NZAID, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the European Union (EU), and the Asia Development Bank (ADB) were also represented along with Pacific educators, academics, government representatives, developmental workers, NGO workers, teachers and tertiary students. A major issue identified in relation to aid relationships was the need for donors and Pacific partners to give priority to improving their relationships towards greater mutuality, openness and trust. Moreover, donors were encouraged to put in place more enabling policies and practices and for Pacific partners to play a more proactive role in the relationship (Sanga and Taufe'ulungaki, 2003). A tangible outcome of this workshop is a recent publication called *Re-Thinking Aid Relationships in Pacific Education (2005).*

(c) A *Rethinking Education in Micronesia* conference was held in RMI in October 2004. Two important questions were asked: What do we want our children to learn, and how do we want them to learn it? A Palauan educator who attended the conference said that, as a result of education programmes being driven by overseas consultants and donor agencies, "students will end up in the margin of life because good decisions are not being made about the development of an education system that makes sense to our environment and people" (Johnson, 2004: 1). As noted by Johnson, donor aid has risen in the last two decades in Micronesian countries and many education programmes are increasingly developed and driven by overseas consultants and donor agencies.

(ii) **National action**

A *Rethinking Vanuatu Education* conference was held in October 2002 for the presentation of research papers and discussion of implications. The conference was a direct outcome of a series of workshops to support development of research skills for Vanuatu educators. An important outcome of this conference is the publication of a book called *Re-thinking Vanuatu Education Together* edited by Sanga et al (2004).

(iii) **Regional Research Fund**

A fund has been established to build local capacity to enable better informed decision-making. This fund will assist Pacific educators to undertake research, publish and disseminate it, and use it in debates on education and as a basis for policy making.

Voice and Speaking Positions

The issue of voice and speaking positions is one of critical importance in postcolonial discourse. As bell hooks (1989: 9) puts it, "moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible".

The important point to note regarding the RPEI is the emphasis placed on Pacific people deciding for themselves what is best for their communities. The insider perspective is crucial here because of their intimate knowledge and experience, and their collective wisdoms. The related issue of voice is also critical as it emphasises the importance of Pacific educators and communities speaking out of themselves and for themselves. The collective voice therefore of Pacific educators and peoples on issues that are close to their hearts and souls is a poignant resistance to and reclaiming of lost ground 'stolen' from them by their colonial past. The issues of representation, power and control will come full circle to Pacific peoples through this process of reclaiming a Pacific vision of education, decided on by Pacific people for Pacific people, so that they can own the process of education and allow healing from the devastating impact of the colonial encounter.

It could be argued that it was the 'voice' of the initiators of the RPEI and their successful lobbying at the Pacific Ministers of Education meeting in Auckland 2001, held under the aegis of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), that resulted in the development of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) and ultimately the birth of the Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of basic Education (the PRIDE Project) in 2004. It was also the 'voice' of the Ministers of Education from the Pacific that articulated in a powerful way what it considered to be a Pacific vision for education.

A Pacific Vision for Education

Is it possible to have education systems that are owned by the people of the Pacific? In light of over a century of colonisation, and the current colonial substitutes of globalisation and educational aid, can Pacific educators develop their own distinctively local systems, firmly founded on their local cultures and traditions, and strongly underpinned by indigenous value systems, philosophies and epistemologies? Is it possible, even desirable, to do so?

The *Rethinking Education Colloquium* held in Suva, Fiji in 2001 began with the assumption that more than three decades of extensive educational reforms in Pacific education and significant investments by national governments and donor agencies have not succeeded in providing quality human resources needed to achieve national developmental goals. The regional representatives at the Colloquium were concerned that educational reforms have

focused too narrowly on improving various aspects of the quantification of education with little attention given to questioning the values and assumptions underpinning formal education. As Taufe'ulungaki (2002: 15) puts it, "The failure of education in the Pacific can be attributed to a large degree to the imposition of an alien system designed for western social and cultural contexts, which are underpinned by quite different values." A continuing interrogation then needs to take place about the values, beliefs, assumptions and ideologies that underpin 'neo-colonial' Pacific educational systems.

The Colloquium agreed on the *Tree of Opportunity* as the most appropriate metaphor for rethinking Pacific education. In this reconceptualisation, education is firmly rooted in the cultures of Pacific societies – in their values, beliefs, histories, worldviews, philosophies, processes and skills, knowledge, arts and crafts, institutions and languages. The *Tree of Opportunity*:

> encapsulates the new vision for Pacific education based on the assumption that the main purpose of education in the Pacific is the survival, transformation and sustainability of Pacific peoples and societies, with its outcomes measured in terms of performance and appropriate behaviour in the multiple context in which they have to live. The primary goal of education, therefore, is to ensure that all Pacific students are successful and that they all become fully participating members of their groups, societies and the global community. (Pene, Taufe'ulungaki & Benson, 2002: 3)

How then can this vision be translated into each of the national education systems of the Pacific? This is where the challenge lies. This is where donor agencies, instead of dictating development terms, should learn from the example of NZAID and RPEI. This is where partnerships between all education stakeholders – educated professionals, civil society organisations, local communities and donors – can be strengthened. This is where partnerships at the regional level can be mobilised. This is where development activities such as the PRIDE Project can have a significant impact.

Rethinking Educational Aid

The *Rethinking Educational Aid in the Pacific* regional conference, funded by NZAID, held in Fiji in 2003 was significant in that it brought regional practitioners, educators, academics and civil society face to face with donor agencies in an attempt to foster a better understanding of the aid relationship. The keynote addresses by key Pacific educators drew attention to the need for donor and Pacific partners to better understand each other's needs, expectations and perspectives, and for educational reform to embrace indigenous philosophies. Six country case study reports were commissioned for Fiji, PNG, RMI, Solomon Islands, Samoa and Tonga by the conference conveners on the impact and effectiveness of educational aid. A tangible outcome of this conference is a forthcoming book of papers presented at the conference,

NZAID, through its work with the RPEI programme since 2001, has broken new ground in the way educational aid can be conceived. Sanga and Holland (2004: 1), the key people in this partnership, demonstrate that it is possible for the dominant partner in an aid relationship to "understand and support the initiative, in a hands-off way, allowing Pacific educators to take the lead in exploring education from their particular perspectives". Other major aid players like AusAID, EU and JICA can learn many lessons from this successful partnership in the dispensation of educational assistance to the Pacific by taking a 'hands-off' approach which supports and nurtures Pacific decision-making.

As emphasised above, this NZAID funded case study through the RPEI is unique. However, aside from this initiative, the general pattern is aptly described by Sanga (2003: 48):

Decades of donor-recipient interactions have not resulted in greater autonomy, strengthened capacities, sustained policy communities and leadership by and for the PICs [Pacific Island Countries]. Instead, donors have continued to control educational agenda, overloaded local institutions with aid activities and preoccupied limited resources with imposed frameworks and value systems. The effects of these on the PICs have been disappointing. In short, PICs have become entangled in aid relationships that, for them, are second-rate and hopeless.

Donor agencies and 'outsiders' need therefore to dismantle their own mindsets about the capability of Pacific Islanders, who in many cases remain the 'others' of Europe. During the colonial era, the colonisers stressed the cultural and racial difference of the 'other' by asserting their domination and superiority over them. This occurred in every lived sphere of colonial subjects through stereotyping and discrimination against the colonised and became institutionalised in the structures of colonial society. This 'epistemic violence' (Spivak: 1995: 24-25) against the 'subaltern' (oppressed subject who is of inferior rank) by constituting the colonial subject as Other "unleashed a myriad cultural and psychological forces, many of them not fully manifest even after 500 years" (Sardar et al., 1993: 83). This 'othering' process has continued in the postcolonial era, with many aid agencies and outside consultants still taking the dominant and controlling position in the aid relationship. Others are seeking to develop a culture of collaboration and consultation where the aid relationship is seen as an 'equal' one and where donors try to understand Pacific perspectives and ways of thinking and doing and to work in more culturally acceptable and appropriate ways.

The PRIDE Project

The PRIDE Project was birthed as part of the implementation strategy of FBEAP. It is co-funded by the EU and NZAID, and has a current life span of six years from 2004 to 2009. The development of a Pacific or regional action plan for basic education arose out of a desire of Pacific Ministers for Education to:
- achieve universal educational participation and achievement
- ensure access and equity and
- improve quality and outcomes (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2001).

The vision for Pacific education is articulated in FBEAP by the Pacific Ministers of Education:

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.

The PRIDE Project[5] was established to assist Pacific countries develop basic education in the region, basic education being defined as all educational provision excepting higher education and including preschool, elementary, primary, secondary and Technical & Vocational Education & Training (TVET). It is managed by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and implemented by the USP Institute of Education in Fiji. The overall objective of the Project 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.

This expansion of opportunities is translated to mean the enhancement of Pacific education agencies to effectively plan and deliver quality basic education through formal and non-formal

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[5] Detailed information on the PRIDE Project can be found on www.usp.ac.fj/pride.

means and to improve the coordination of donor inputs to assist countries implement their plans. The purpose of the PRIDE Project is fourfold:

(a) To assist Ministries of Education in the 15 countries develop comprehensive strategic plans, primarily through provision of local/regional technical assistance.

(b) To implement key priority areas in these strategic plans via the provision of sub-project funding; over 50% of the total funding is set aside for this purpose.

(c) To coordinate donor inputs and activities to ensure effective harmonisation of educational assistance to the region.

(d) To strengthen regional and national capacities through the development of a regional educational resource centre.

There are several unique differences between the PRIDE Project and other aid-funded projects in the Pacific, as described by Teasdale, Tokai & Puamau (2004):

(a) It was designed and approved by the Pacific Ministers for Education: the process started with them, not with the donors; the EU and NZAID have shown a remarkable willingness to let this happen.

(b) The choice of the acronym – PRIDE – was deliberate. Each country is being encouraged to build its education plan on a strong foundation of local cultures, languages and epistemologies, thus enabling students to develop a deep pride in their own values, traditions, traditions and wisdoms, and a clear sense of their own local cultural identity.

(c) There is a strong emphasis on mutual collaboration and support. The aim of the Project is to help countries to help each other. Drawing on regional expertise is an important feature of the Project.

(d) Consultative and participatory approaches are encouraged where there is a strong commitment to bottom-up processes involving parents, teachers, students, private providers, employers, local communities, NGOs and other civil society organisations.

(e) Ministers desire the Project to promote a more holistic and lifelong approach to education, with effective articulation between sectors, and between schools, TVET and the world of work.

(f) The PRIDE Project team is committed to building a strong conceptual foundation for the Project.

In developing strategic plans for education, the PRIDE Project has developed, with the help of National PRIDE Coordinators, a set of 10 benchmarks that are used to review each national educational strategic plan:

- Pride in cultural and national identity
- Skills for life and work in a global world
- Alignment with national development plans and regional and international conventions
- Access and equity for students with special needs
- Partnerships with communities and stakeholders
- A holistic approach to basic education
- Realistic financial costing
- Use of data in educational planning
- Effective capacity building for all education personnel
- A framework for monitoring and evaluation.

The PRIDE Project has much potential to impact on the development of education in the Pacific. There are still 4½ years left in the life of the Project. While there are already positive ripples arising out of the Project in the region, time will tell if this donor funded project will

impact directly on what counts most in education – qualitative improvement in student learning outcomes.

(Re)Conceptualising the PRIDE Project

Given the concerns raised thus far in the paper, particularly arising out of RPEI, how can the PRIDE Project be conceptualised further to take note of local/global intersections, insider/outsider perspectives and the temporal/spiritual binarism? How can Pacific curricula become more holistic and inclusive so that technical and lifelong learning can join academic learning as integral parts of mainstream schooling? Where does values education fit in?

Current Conceptual Framework

As mentioned earlier, one of the unique features of the PRIDE Project is the commitment of the team to building a strong conceptual framework for the Project. This conceptual framework, as articulated at a Commonwealth of Learning (COL) workshop in Vancouver (Teasdale, Tokai and Puamau, 2004), draws initially from the Report to UNESCO of its International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, also referred to as the Delors Report (Delors, 1996). The first two pillars of learning highlighted in the report – 'learning to know' and 'learning to do' – are adequately covered in Pacific schools, in fact so much so that there is a serious imbalance, with the other two pillars – 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together' – receiving relatively little attention.

A serious imbalance also exists in the current Pacific curriculum which places an emphasis on academic learning – 'learning to know' – and treats TVET, life skills and lifelong learning – part of the 'learning to do' pillar – as second class. The PRIDE Project seeks to rectify this imbalance by having as a benchmark the principle that national education plans should contain strategies for the systematic teaching of literacy, numeracy, ICT and English together with life and work preparation skills, thereby equipping all students to take their place in a global world with ease and confidence. This benchmark seeks a better balance between the so called academic subjects (literacy, numeracy and English) with life and work preparation skills that include ICT, TVET, the visual and performing arts, together with skills for self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

The suggested shift in focus from the teacher to the learner as exemplified in the Delors Report is highly significant for the Pacific as it is elsewhere in the world. Ministries of Education will need to grapple with this global shift. The knowledge explosion brought about by improved ICT has meant that teachers and other education professionals, including teacher educators, will need to devise new ways of delivering education to students. With the increasing advent of the independent, lifelong learner, the role of teacher as facilitator of learning, rather than the old role of dispenser of knowledge, is becoming increasingly important. In particular, teachers have:

> responsibility to help students make effective and appropriate use of this knowledge which requires a capacity to critically appraise all of the material available to them and to make value judgements of it, often from moral and ethical perspectives. School curricula therefore need to focus on developing the critical capacities of students, enabling them to know themselves, to think for themselves, and thus become active and confident learners. (Teasdale, Tokai & Puamau, 2004: 5)

In this conception, teachers have to lead by example. They need to be role models if they are to facilitate moral and ethical decision-making on the part of their students. They need to be culturally and spiritually grounded to make a positive impact. If they are unable to provide moral and ethical leadership in the classroom, their role as 'teacher', facilitator and guide will not be effectively fulfilled. Teacher training institutions must develop appropriate programmes

to help foster the development of teachers of integrity and sound character, who in turn will be able to guide their students into making moral and ethical choices in their learning and living.

Teasdale (2005) further develops the conceptual underpinnings of the PRIDE Project by briefly exploring philosophical perspectives, including post-modernism, and their implications for education reform in the Pacific. He suggests that global ways of thinking are changing: that they are shifting:

    (a) from a relatively finite system of knowledge, where the world is assumed to be basically knowable, to the infinite;

    (b) from the certainty and predictability of the old scientific understandings of the past few centuries, to the uncertainties and unpredictabilities of the new sciences of chaos theory, quantum mechanics and the like; here, the 'new' scientists are admitting that they do not have the answers to questions about ultimate realities, and they affirm the importance of subjective and spiritual explanations of the creation of the universe and the meaning of life;

    (c) from neatly packaged and defined areas of knowledge to much more holistic and integrated ways of thinking and knowing;

    (d) from the security of positivism and structuralism to the insecurities and uncertainties of the post-structural and the post-modern; the right questions need to be found rather than searching for the right answers; and

    (e) from an exclusively western/global discourse to new forms of dialogue between the western and the indigenous; i.e., there is now a genuine attempt to search for complementarities between the global and the local.

Teasdale then goes on to discuss the implications of the above for educational planning and reform in the Pacific, noting the correspondence between post-modernism, the new scientific thinking and the ways of knowing of many local and indigenous cultures. In particular, he notes the importance of the spiritual, of social relationships and of the unity of knowledge, in building a strong foundation for Pacific education.

A Holistic Approach

How can education reform in the Pacific be reconceptualised? A holistic approach needs to be taken not only in discussions on education in the Pacific but more importantly in its practices and processes. Currently, learning and what happens in schools is disparate and disconnected from the daily lives of students. It is mainly abstract, too academic and fragmented. As emphasised by Teasdale (2005), from a traditional perspective, the two pillars of 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together', until the colonial era, "were a fundamental part of a holistic process of lifelong learning" throughout the Pacific. In order to regain wholeness and a seamless connection in education, a shift must now occur in the following areas:

(1) Balanced and holistic ways of 'knowing', 'doing', 'being' and 'living together' need to be reflected in curricula. The current perception that livelihoods and life skills knowledges are of second class status should be discarded. A more holistic approach to learning would necessitate a better balance in academic, technical, vocational, life skills and lifelong learning. As well, a holistic approach needs to be taken also to the old demarcations between the various levels of education – pre-school, kindergarten, primary/elementary, secondary, technical/vocational – with more effective articulation between each level.

(2) Because formal schooling is largely derived from foreign value systems, there is a serious cultural gap between the lived experiences of most Pacific Island students and what is offered in schools, including the way schooling is organised and structured, the culture and ethos of schooling, its pedagogical practices and the assessment of learning. And because the outcomes of schooling continue to be measured in terms of examination passes, many Pacific Islanders

fail to succeed in school. A holistic approach to education will also mean a rethinking of all these factors.

(3) A holistic approach to education will particularly necessitate a culturally inclusive curriculum where cultural and linguistic literacy is part of what is offered in schools (Thaman, 1992). It is critical that every child learns the language, culture and traditions of the particular human society into which s/he is born. This is particularly so for indigenous cultures. It is important that the curriculum is grounded in the local cultural systems of knowledge and wisdom. The cultural identity of indigenous peoples must be reaffirmed at school, beginning with a culturally inclusive and democratic curriculum which halts the "cultural and environmental bankruptcy" that is "an affliction which has been an obstacle to sustainable development in much of the modern world" (Thaman, 1995: 732). It is envisaged that curriculum development for schools (Thaman, 1992) and teacher training institutions (Thaman, 1996) will focus on making the curriculum more culturally democratic at these sites.

(4) The spiritual development of the child currently is missing from most educational discourse in the Pacific. This is a serious gap that needs to be rectified. An emphasis on spiritual development or moral education needs to occur in Pacific schools. The region has successfully internalised Christianity as the dominant religion. Because the bulk of a child's waking hours are spent at school, and because of changing economic and social conditions which weaken the role of the church and families, I believe schools and their teachers now have a crucial role in building morally strong citizens for the future. The teaching of Christian values and principles therefore should be incorporated into the curricula of Pacific schools. At the same time, however, an inclusive environment strongly suggests that the spiritual needs of non-Christian students also be taken into account.

Countries that are developing or reviewing their curricula should ask the following questions (Puamau, 1999: 330):
a)   What are the current curriculum goals? What should the goals be?
b)   What and whose values, philosophy, ideology does the curriculum profess? What and whose values or ideals should it promote?
c)   What knowledge, skills and attitudes should the curriculum emphasise?
d)   Who decides on content?
e)   What language should the curriculum be taught in?
f)   Whose interests will the curriculum serve?
g)   What are the social, educational, economic and political implications of such a curriculum?

In order to have a holistic approach to curriculum reconceptualisation, these questions should be answered in light of the quest to be culturally inclusive, to be cognisant of indigenous concerns, and to blend both local and global ways of knowing and doing. Values education or spiritual development should also be included in this holistic approach to education.

Local/Global Intersections

To take a holistic approach also means syncretising local and global perspectives in order to adopt the best of both. The successful blending of global and local ways of thinking and doing is at the heart of the PRIDE Project. In privileging the voices of participants at the first PRIDE regional workshop on educational planning in 2004, Puamau (2005) articulates the importance of blending the best of local ways of knowing with global approaches. The 12 principles considered by participants to be crucial to educational planning in the Pacific include: strong, objective and visionary leadership; participatory and consultative approaches; localising ownership; realistic, achievable and affordable plans; valid, reliable data; alignment of plans to national, regional and international goals and conventions; effective training and capacity building; flexibility; well planned monitoring and evaluation; cultural inclusivity; balance in

curriculum and learning outcomes; and attention to access and equity issues. This is an important contribution to the literature on educational planning because it gives 'voice' to and privileges local perspectives while drawing on what is best from the global.

However, before blending the local and global, it is critical to develop solid local foundations, where Pacific Islanders have explored all micro dimensions of their specific contexts in order to build a strong body of local/Pacific knowledge. Pacific researchers should take a deliberate stance to document and record local perspectives and solutions. An example is Sanga's (2004) valuable account of how his community in the Solomon Islands resolved conflict at the community level without external help by drawing on their spiritual reserves firmly founded on their Christian faith. This account is invaluable not only for its emphasis on the need for good leadership by the elders in the community, but just as importantly for its emphasis on Christian faith as the most powerful weapon in dealing with tribal conflict.

In terms of the reconceptualisation of the curriculum, there needs to be a review of the content of learning so that the local and global occupy a balanced space. The curriculum not only should be culturally democratic, but also geared to meet the challenging 'new times' that are characteristic of the western capitalist world. The reconceptualised curriculum should address the question of how students re-invent themselves as culturally hybrid, complex and dynamic human subjects in a new global era.

A synthesis, therefore, of the best from indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge bases seems the most useful approach to take, the curriculum striking a balance between the local and global. It must take into account the need to value the cultural identity of the indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Sir Geoffrey Henry (1992: 14), then Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, summed it up thus:

> One thing that the University of Life has taught me is that, while there are black and white dogmas, philosophies, and solutions, the areas of grey are large… The ideologies belong to the extremes while, between them, there exists an infinite range of possibilities… With such a range of opportunity, answers will emerge.

It is this range of opportunities, of possibilities that exist between the extremities of non-Western and Western knowledge systems, that should be explored in order to ensure both cultural and social survival yet, just as importantly, economic survival in postmodern conditions heavily influenced by the processes of colonialism, neocolonialism, westernisation, globalisation and economic rationalism. Pacific nations therefore should be concerned not only about the role of education in preserving essential knowledges, skills and values for the maintenance of local cultural identity, but conversely, the role of education in generating new values and competencies considered necessary for the future development of the country in a competitive global world (Power, 1992: 17).

Reality of the Spiritual - Values and Moral Education

In the Pacific, I believe it is necessary for education to take a more subjective and spiritual approach, and to include local values, ethics and wisdoms. As in Western schools, however, the spiritual – heart and soul knowledge - is largely absent from Pacific schooling. Because of the spiritual nature of Pacific Islanders where Christian faith is an integral part of their lives, this dimension needs to be valued and brought into the curriculum. A commitment to building a strong foundation for Pacific education in the cultural values and spirituality of each country would contribute to the 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together' pillars of learning that the Delors Report advocates.

This concern to ground Pacific education in the spirituality of each country resonates with Edmund O'Sullivan's argument that contemporary western education lacks a comprehensive

cosmology and "must take on the concerns of the development of the spirit at a more fundamental level" (1999: 259). He observes that both traditional wisdom, particularly of indigenous cultures, and an emergent form of knowledge coming from the ecological sciences provide a radical view of the earth community. He notes that western cultures have much to learn from indigenous world views regarding a balanced relationship between humans and nature that the traditional western scientific perspective has failed to do.

The dominant faith in the Pacific is Christianity, a legacy of the evangelising work of missionaries that came in the wake of colonial expansion, or perhaps even drove it. The missionaries, together with traders and beachcombers, became colonial agents, working with colonial governments to annex and transform Pacific islands. They developed orthographies for some indigenous languages, translated the Bible into the vernacular, and established rudimentary schools to teach the 'natives' how to read so that they could study the Bible. Christianising most of the Pacific through these means allowed formal schooling to be introduced in the colonies.

Most Pacific Islanders were (and still are) deeply spiritual. They found significant resonance between their traditional spiritualities and the newly introduced Christian faith, and rapidly syncretised their own values and beliefs with it. As a consequence Christian discourse became well established in social and political life. All Pacific constitutions were founded on the values and principles of Christianity. It makes sense therefore that these principles and values should underpin the reform of education.

In my own view the Pacific needs citizens who are not only strongly rooted in their traditional cultures, languages and epistemologies but who are equally strongly grounded in their Christian faith, confident to take their place on both local and international stages. This will be in keeping with the overall objective of the PRIDE Project: "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".

Are there inherent contradictions in the fact that many Pacific Islanders who critique the impact of colonialism at the same time deeply value Christian beliefs and principles? Why have Pacific Islanders embraced Christianity and made it their own, yet are looking for alternatives to their education systems? The answer lies in the ownership principle. The wholehearted acceptance of Christianity has enabled it to permeate the lived reality of many Pacific societies. People have taken ownership of it, internalising its values and principles. On the other hand, formal schooling is still viewed as foreign, abstract, meaningless and irrelevant by many people. Because the culture of schooling generally is not synchronous with the culture of the students, high failure rates and underachievement are the norm for many Pacific Islanders (Puamau, 1999b). Indigenous communities have successfully integrated Christianity into their cultural practices, yet view schooling to be outside their ambit of control and something difficult to understand.

Most Pacific Islanders express a close affinity with their Christian God, land, nature, village and kinspeople. They value and maintain their social and religious relationships. It is the intricate network of social, family and church relationships that helps to ensure the survival of the group through interdependence and cooperation. The interests of the group and not of the individual are important to them. Their thinking is based on mutuality, not separateness. As Teasdale emphasised (2005), the Pacific needs to rediscover this interconnectedness, and develop curriculum processes that recognise and affirm our interdependence and mutuality, both in a human context, and with the natural world around us.

What values, then, should underpin Pacific educational systems? I have already indicated that Christian values currently underpin the constitutions of the Pacific Islands. It is my contention

that Christian values also should underpin the curriculum and permeate the organisation and culture of Pacific schools. A balance needs to be struck in the notion that education and religion are separate entities and should not merge. A thread underlying this paper is the principle that Pacific values and ways of thinking and doing should become a hegemonic feature of everyday life and underpin Pacific education systems. Educational and political leaders need to deliberately analyse and unpick the current content, practices and organisation of schooling to see where more emphasis can be placed on the spiritual development of students. After all, a holistic, balanced and inter-connected approach would mean a good balance in the academic (mental), social, physical, cultural and spiritual development of each student.

The issue of making moral and ethical decisions is significant in these new times of rapid social, cultural, political, economic and technological change. As mentioned earlier, students will need to be guided into making sound moral and ethical choices in everything they do, whether in or outside the classroom. While the family as the basic social unit of society, and the church, can play a significant role in this area, their impact is neutralised by the changing dynamics brought about by urbanisation, globalisation, changing economic structures including high levels of poverty and the like. It is therefore imperative that schools also take the lead in 'teaching' and 'practising' sound moral values. The building of character through moral education should be strongly emphasised in school organisation and curriculum so that upright, law-abiding citizens are produced who can live lives of moral significance.

As emphasised already, Pacific schools should also be underpinned by Pacific indigenous values, principles, beliefs, ideologies, knowledges and wisdoms. As indicated earlier, there is no logical inconsistency between indigeneity and Christianity because Pacific Islanders have so successfully integrated their Christian faith into their cultures. The cultural values of Pacific Islanders should saturate their individual and collective consciousness so that they permeate the educational system and become hegemonic features of the educational landscape. For example, the underlying values and beliefs that guide local Pacific planning processes include: cooperation; unity; reciprocity; respect for authority, each other and the environment; maintaining culture and traditions; maintaining family and community relationships; sharing and caring; religious or spiritual nurturing; moral character development; and capacity building (Puamau, 2005). The rethinking initiative of Pacific educators should continue to examine ways that the spiritual and the cultural can become embedded in the school. There is a real need for heart and soul knowledge alongside the head knowledge emphasised through academic discourse. This will contribute to reclaiming 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together' in Pacific education. Further research is needed in these areas because they currently hold such marginal positions in education discourse.

Pacific Research

It is imperative that a body of local Pacific knowledge be established. Current initiatives to fund research on important issues regarding Pacific nations and peoples will help to meet Taufe'ulungaki's (2003: 31) goal of developing "a unique Pacific world view that is underpinned by Pacific values, belief systems and ways of structuring knowledge". It must begin with more discussion of the colonial past in order to dismantle colonial mindsets. Hegemonic neocolonial practices, based on assumptions that what is western is good and what is indigenous is inferior, likewise must be dismantled. Much has already been said in this paper about areas of research that need be pursued by Pacific peoples, particularly educators and researchers. Pacific people:

> need to create their own pedagogy and symbolic orders, their own sources of authority, mediating structures and appropriate standards in development and education, which are rooted in their own Pacific values, beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, processes and practices, and particularly in those values which support sustainability and equity of benefits, not necessarily measured in economic terms. (Taufe'ulungaki, 2002: 19)

Taufe'ulungaki (2003: 28-29) notes that she is seeking for alternatives "in the fragmented world we are creating for ourselves" because the western paradigms adopted in the Pacific are inappropriate "for achieving the kinds of societies we wish for ourselves and for our children". This failure, she continues, "is an outcome of fundamental flaws in the paradigms themselves and not due to ineffectiveness in their implementation or imperfect understanding of their rationale and guiding principles". What needs to be done, she argues, is "to look for the causes in the core values underpinning western development paradigms to understand the inherent contractions between the avowed developmental goals and outcomes."

In relation to research, Taufe'ulungaki (2003: 35) emphasises that in any research activity, the following questions need to be asked: Whose values? Whose knowledge? Whose cognitive and philosophical theories? Whose research paradigms, methodologies, techniques and procedures should be investigated, used and transmitted? And whose agendas? These are important questions that need to be borne in mind by Pacific Islanders conducting any research on Pacific issues.

To demonstrate the concern of Pacific Islanders to rethink their own indigenous epistemologies and weave them into contemporary academic discourse, a conference is planned for July 2006 on the theme, *Vakavuku. Navigating Knowledge: Pacific Epistemologies*, at the USP in Fiji[6]. In response to the need to retrieve, reclaim and build upon Pacific ways of thinking, the conference will address questions such as: What does it mean to be a Pacific Islander? What exactly is Pacific epistemology? How do we think and respond to the issues facing the Pacific? What exactly do we 'build upon' to move forward? Additionally, the following questions are pertinent: How do we know what we know? Where do we learn it from? How do we represent it and ourselves? How do we understand the world, life, death, happiness, love, authority? Where does this understanding come from? Where does it take us? Huffe and Qalo (2004) have advocated the following:

> A body of Pacific thought should contribute to the establishment or affirmation of a Pacific philosophy and ethic – a set of applicable concepts and values to guide interaction within countries, within the region, and with the rest of the world. The ethic must be acknowledged, understood, and respected by all who interact with Pacific communities.

Concluding Remarks

There is no doubt that the colonial encounter with indigenous peoples of the Pacific region, as elsewhere, brought untold psychological, social and cultural damage. After decolonisation Pacific peoples, living in small island countries, continue to grapple with challenges brought about by the impact and influence of neocolonialism, westernisation, globalisation, foreign aid and market capitalism. The education systems, amongst other things, in each of the 15 Pacific countries of the PRIDE Project have been significantly affected by these onslaughts.

Increasing numbers of educated Pacific Islanders, particularly in Pacific and New Zealand universities, have begun to question and interrogate the values, beliefs, world views, ideologies, processes and structures that underpin their current realities. They have begun the process of unpicking their way through the effects of colonialism in order to make sense of where they are, before they can chart a progressive way forward for the Pacific. This is particularly evident in the 'Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative' discussed in this paper which has provided the impetus for a more aggressive interrogation of the historical past and postcolonial present. The

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[6] For more information on this conference, visit the website www.usp.ac.fj/vakavuku.

need for a collective mobilisation of the Pacific spirit in order to bring about a positive transformation in the lives of local communities is evident.

In reconceptualising educational reform in the Pacific, and the work of the PRIDE Project, the need for a holistic approach to education, including grounding formal schooling in the spiritual and cultural realities of indigenous communities, has been emphasised. This holistic approach should also include working towards a balance in the following areas: curriculum coverage; levels of schooling; school structures and lived experiences of Pacific peoples; local and global intersections; and insider and outsider perspectives. Research that concerns Pacific education and its relationship to development, amongst other things, needs to be undertaken on a more intense scale in order to build up a body of knowledge that is unique to the Pacific.

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