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Paper No. 16

CULTURE, EDUCATION AND AID

Lyn Haynes

Dotted throughout the Pacific Ocean are minute specks of land, floating like bits of cork in a glass of wine. They are too small to be economically self-sustaining, but too important to ignore. Some of these countries have fish or copra to export. Others resort to sending their young men to work abroad in the merchant navy. Such so-called 'independent nations' are almost totally dependent on international aid for their well-being. Whose decision will decide their future? Could it realistically be that of the donor nations? There exist many examples of donor-driven planning, the most common and far reaching being in education. A recent study followed what happened when the third smallest independency (Tuvalu) was offered free teacher resource materials for primary science. These were to be compiled, tested and distributed at almost no cost to the government/state.

A major problem in education is whether or not to pursue the western approach as introduced by the missionaries or by colonial powers. Local teachers have been taught by protagonists of this now traditional method, so try to perpetuate the status quo. Consequently the home culture tends to remain subservient to the dominant forces. During the past twenty-five years great progress has been made in many countries to break free from colonial and missionary powers. Culture, other than western culture, has tentatively emerged and accorded some space in the curriculum.

Finding the fine divide between an overloaded and an insubstantial curricula is no easy task. Furthermore, attaining the balance between international culture and local culture through academic subjects is also a headache. It is all too simple to overlocalise a curriculum, thereby reducing the international credence of the country's education system. The way to achieve balance is to find the right person to be involved in the development of curricula and teaching materials. In the case of Tuvalu it was the author who came forward to offer her services. She had taught in the country for five years, learned the mother tongue, and had even been adopted into a local family. She went to great efforts to understand the culture and economy, as well as the environment. She was what one can term an 'inside-outsider', possibly the person best suited to the task of developing resource materials for a new curriculum. She offered to help and her offer was accepted, but the beginning of work had to be postponed because of illness.

One of the greatest problems is 'Pacific time', and thus communication. Those in the island's Education Department failed to inform her that her offer had been superseded: Australian Aid [AIDAB] had proposed developing a new curriculum for the country (class 1 through class 10), and also providing teacher training and resources. Text books were promised from the Northern Territories of Australia and from North America. What was offered came as shock. A curriculum was being developed that would be non-local (though there was to be a consultation task force made up of local teachers and educationalists). The resource materials were foreign. The wheel had turned full circle.

The picture of the ice-cream van selling cones in the street is the first sequence in the American text depicting seasons. Consider the relevancy to one who lives where there are few cars or vans, no grass verges outside the home or macadamised streets! The following picture is of fall and then six foot of snow outside the same home. How appropriate is this to a child who has never been in conditions colder than 25°C or hotter than 33°C? In a country situated just south of the equator where the major manifestation between mid-summer and mid-winter is that the sun rises 20 minutes later. The concept of four seasons is incomprehensible. On reading the draft curriculum for science the author was appalled at some of the set pieces for the children, many of whom do not have running water, water-borne sewage or electricity in their homes. So much pointed to the lack of understanding about, empathy for, or even care about the pupils and their background. No attention was paid to the interesting and different ecological habitats on the nine different islands. Instead of getting pupils to design wooden dug-out fishing canoes or hand-made fishing tackle, it was suggested that they should design, build and test a hovercraft, a helicopter and an underwater diving chamber! The time allocation for DMA (Design, Make and Appraise) process is

unrealistic. If the draft curriculum layout is to be read as it would appear, length of time suggested for the DMA process of building a helicopter, is just one lesson ! One should appreciate that although most of the children see helicopters, books are few and those living on the outer islands do not even have television.

The author had intended to approach DMA from a local perspective, eg. *Design and construct a local outrigger canoe*. The pupils would be expected to use local resources to build the canoe. This would include asking the village elders and experts for their knowledge as to which tree to use and how best to construct the canoe, albeit as a scale model. There would be ample scope for pupils to test other local wood in order to determine which was the most appropriate. The design of the canoe could also be challenged. Such a project might take an entire school term, but the pupils would approach the project with enthusiasm, the community would be involved and thus feel less threatened by modern education. Pupils would have the opportunity to develop the ability to conduct fair tests, grounded in knowledge, and yet make a useful contribution towards the regeneration of traditional methods. In economic terms, well-made model craft could be sold in the craft shop on the capital island, thereby generating revenue for the school. This was but one of many ideas that had been considered because they were seen by an outsider to be scientific, relevant and practicable, as well as community-binding.

Many Pacific islanders talk of ecological sustainability as an imperative factor in their education. How can such examples as these, decreed by the donor country, be of genuine benefit to a ten year old child on Tavalu?

There are far too many anomalous examples of this kind to cite them all. Instead I should prefer to focus on the lesson to be learned from this. Those who give aid should strive to be less domineeringly prescriptive and more sensitive to the real needs of the beneficiary. Far too many aid projects become white elephants, costing the country money that they can ill afford. The idea that x amount of aid money is set aside from the annual national budget and must be spent before the next financial year is what places undue stress on both the donor and receiver. Too often the donor consultants realise that if they do not allocate the funds, then their budgets will be slashed. In a world of ever decreasing real available funds, this is a Catch-22 scenario. The world is fast becoming a global village. Local identity is even more imperative now than when each country existed as a remote out station. This local trade mark must be passed on through the formal education system. Though it should not be forgotten that in many developing nations, the role of informal though the auspices of the village elders and experts in different fields is still upheld - someone we tend to see being shelved in the much of the west.

(REFLECTION ON AND PLANNING APPROPRIATE MATERIALS FOR TEACHING
PRIMARY SCIENCE IN A DEVELOPING ATOLL NATION Evelyn M. Haynes PGDES September
1996 Department of Educational Studies, Oxford.)

COUNTRY REPORT SCHEME

1. Primary Education: One government primary school on each of the nine islands
One private church school (Roman Catholic) on the capital

Start school in the academic year (Jan to Nov) in which they turn 5
Class 1 through to class 7 is primary and compulsory

Secondary Education:

All Class 7 students sit an entrance exam to the government secondary school - Motufoua.

Top third (equal numbers of boys and girls - where possible, but usually many more girls) gain entry to Motufoua Form 1

Some Year 8 pupils sit a late entry exam. for entrance into Motufoua Form 2

Those who do not gain entry to the state secondary school (i.e. elitist secondary education) try for a place (on academic merit) in the fee-paying church school that was opened in 1991 on the capital island.

Yet more go to church schools in Fiji.

Those who are yet unsuccessful stay on until the end of Year 10 (age 14) at the CTC Community Training School. The new proposal by AIDAB does not clarify the future of the CTCs (one per island) but it would appear that these will be phased out/stopped.

2. In the primary education up to 1996 science syllabuses were for classes 3 through 7, CTC 8 - 10, and Motufoua (Forms 1 - 5). The church secondary school opted for IGCSE based curricula and exams.

The primary science was called Environmental Science in an attempt to alleviate the fears that local teachers have about science and teaching it. This syllabus contained very simple physics, chemistry and biology, but lacked evidence of agricultural science. The new AIDAB developed curriculum has moved away from local relevance and application.

3. Secondary education is three tiered:

- * free state secondary school for the top third academically based on the results of an entrance exam in English and Maths
- * fee paying places for the next third, based on academic achievement, in the church school
- * until 1996 - CTC Community Training Centres for vocational training.

Science is compulsory in all years from class 3 to class 10 (CTC) and Forms 1 to 4 (Fiji Junior Certificate; Form 5 (two years) New Zealand Fifth Form Certificate.

Maths is also compulsory through all these phases.

Specialisation in science takes place for those who are granted scholarships through international aid to study in Fiji, NZ or Australia. Those entering medical or science fields will then continue with science, others will drop it.

4a) Parents were not that keen on science because it was not one of the entrance exam subjects. The fact that until 1989 it was taught mainly by foreigners improved its status. This was a sad indictment on the influence of the colonial past on the attitudes of the community to education and certain subjects.

Parents were keen for their children to do well in order not to let their island down (lose face) and to be granted a scholarship.

In the secondary state school the pupils were at school, a boarding establishment from mid January to early November. Many parents could speak and read no English, neither was it feasible for them to help their children as they were away at boarding school.

4b) The local village community had little to do with education. In fact they were sceptical about the value and outcome of education. In many ways they were afraid of losing their value to, and position in, the community. There is enormous scope to use the experts in the village community to work with the science classes and their teachers. This would also help to pass on traditional methods and skills such as outrigger canoe-making, fishing etc.

On the outer islands the major industry was the soap factory on the same island as the state secondary school. They were quite willing to show the pupils the way soap was made etc., but a link of the western nature is not realistic nor feasible.

On the capital there has been a push to spur entrepreneurial development, but most of it is of the "home-industry" nature.