

Searching for an Inclusive National Consciousness through Education: Ethnicity, Identity and Diversity – The Case of Fiji.

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Introduction

It is indeed a great honor to present a paper at this conference. I acknowledge the presence of educators and colleagues who have come here to combine voices in the hope of shaping a sharper vision of education for all of our children.

The issue of developing quality education for all continues to be a topical one worldwide. In the Pacific, the ever-present challenges of limited resources and smallness of scale dictate any educational change and innovation. In addition to financial and human resource concerns, the questions of access, equity and the participation of all groups remain high on the agenda.

This paper does not purport to answer all of Fiji's educational problems; however, it does attempt to provide a platform from which a more focused education system can emerge. The rationale behind this discourse is that:

1. Social diversity has philosophical, sociological and psychological implications for education;
2. A more inclusive, holistic and future based approach to curriculum development will provide a clearer, defined vision that will effectively identify achievable short and long-term educational goals. These should be in keeping with the country's commitment to the UN's conventions on Human Rights and against all forms of discrimination; including the Millennium Development Goals, Delors Report, EFA, CEDAW, Rights of the Child, Indigenous and Cultural rights;
3. Education has an important role to play in addressing the challenges that diversity presents; and
4. Multicultural Education developed in context and properly implemented, could help to address issues of marginalisation and oppression in the existing system.

A brief history of our Multiculturedness: The Politics of Numbers

*...Islanders everywhere
Swept in the river of humanity
Flowing down the streets...*

Teweriki Teaero '*Here too*' 2000

*Family and things familial
are not numbers in a small square.
But burst huge and fresh
From the smallness of dots,
On maps that sometimes forget
To tell all about us*

Mohit Prasad '*Familial*' 1998

Archeological findings indicate that the first inhabitants probably arrived [in Fiji] about 4000 years ago. Various artifacts trace connections between Fiji and other Pacific Island countries such as Samoa, Tonga and the Marquesas islands. Although first sightings have been dated at 1643, by Abel Tasman, real contact is recorded to have begun with the west as beginning in the 1800's with the Sandalwood and Bech de mer trade and the introduction of Christianity.¹

While it is widely acknowledged that the ancestors of the Indian population were brought to Fiji under the Indenture System to provide labour on the cane fields, it is less well known that indentured laborers were brought in from Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati in the same period². Ratuva (2000) identifies how various ethnic communities made Fiji their home. His groupings include: Indians, Asians, Banabans, Chinese, Europeans, I-Kiribati, Rotuman, Samoan, Tongan, Tuvaluan, and Wallesian³.

The Challenge of Social Diversity

The pluralistic society that is Fiji presents a multidimensional challenge for policy and decision makers. Racial and religious diversity, disparity of lower income earners, and the increasing urban rural divide have resulted in a number of outcomes. Due to the time constraints of this presentation, I will only mention these briefly. They are:

1. Varied degrees of commitment to Multiculturalism;
2. Deliberate and consequential misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the distinction between pluralism, multiculturalism and multicultural education;
3. Segregation and polarisation between races institutionalized through a communal based voting system;
4. Conflict between and within various groups (ethnic, racial and religious);
5. Segregated schools and schooling; and,
6. Affirmative Action targeted at Fijians and Rotumans.

The benefits and trade-offs of multiculturalism have been discussed many times in Fiji with varied opinion on its overall appropriateness. Ratuva (2000) surmises that although "*Multiculturalism was the main discourse after Independence, it referred to the distinctiveness by co-existence of ethnic groups under negotiated political terms such as the separate political representation of different ethnic groups.*"⁴ Because of this, the term multiculturalism is associated with politics and politicking along racial lines.

The Davis Report (2000) examined both the Reeves Report and the 1997 Constitution in the context of the conflicts and attitudes of the two major races, Indians and Fijians. In it, Davis discusses the attitudes of Fijians towards multiculturalism. He states that

This raises the hackles of many Fijians for two principal reasons. First, multiculturalism embodies the perception that the islands are home to many distinct cultures which, in the interests of equality and non-discrimination, should be similarly encouraged and projected...This in turn, disproportionately discriminates against Fijian culture in its representation on the world tapestry...Secondly, 'multiculturalism' is often used especially by those believing themselves to be educated and of liberal outlook, to advance a subtle though pernicious form of racism...used to conceal condescending views on the inferiority of Fijian culture, views that are anything but noble, tolerant or progressive.⁵

One dilemma that has arisen is that of acceptable ethnic labels and the possibility of a singular national name for all Fiji Citizens. The indigenous people of Fiji are commonly referred to as 'Fijians' and all others as 'Fiji Islanders'. The legitimization of use of the names 'Indo-Fijians' and 'Fiji-Indians' has been disputed on many fronts. Discourse on race issues remains emotionally charged with two of the most forceful outbursts being made by prominent indigenous females in the Upper and Lower Houses. One individual argued that indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians would always be different as long as indigenous Fijians comb their hair upwards and Indo-Fijians comb theirs down. The second individual recently called for the criminalisation of the term 'Indo-Fijian' as use of the name 'Fijian' was a privileged right reserved for the indigenous of the land.

A variety of ethnic labels are in use for purely functional purposes and while some may refer to 'Fijians' in a specific context, this would most probably refer to the indigenous. Some prefer to be more specific and use 'Indigenous Fijian'. The 1997 Constitution of the Fiji Islands following the recommendations of the Reeves Report does not dictate the use of specific ethnic labels. However, some mention is made in section 2 of the Fijian Affairs Act.

'Fijian' includes every member of an aboriginal race indigenous to Fiji and also includes every member of an aboriginal race indigenous to Melanesia, Micronesia or Polynesia living in Fiji who has elected to live in a Fijian village. ⁶

Interestingly, through dialogue with Indian friends and students, it has been found that many Indo-Fijians refer to Hindus as Indians, which excludes Muslims. This adds another dimension to the debate. Other ethnic communities are often discussed in a singular category of 'others' (see Population Tables in Appendices) or as the 1997 Constitution clearly states, "*Rotuman people, Pacific Islanders, Indians and Chinese.*" ⁷ Willoughby (2004) explores the legality of a common name and concludes:

Lastly, the statutes do not prescribe a single, unifying name for all people living in Fiji...and only uses the expression "the people of the Fiji islands". This is consistent with the Fiji Constitution Review Commission, which had proposed the common name 'Fiji Islanders', but considered it was not necessary to make provision for this. Nor do the statutes prohibit any particular name from being used to designate all people living in Fiji. As a result, the debate is left wide open. ⁸

In terms of Religious conflict, anecdotal evidence shows, that sporadic desecration of temples takes place around Fiji. What is noticed is that most times, Hindu temples are targeted around the country.⁹ Recent break-ins however, have been reported in Catholic churches in the central Suva area. The motive of the perpetrators may be argued as simple theft but the hurt felt by the various religious communities concerned is often seen as a direct strike against their religious beliefs and practices.

An example of such questionable motives was seen the break-in at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, in Suva a few years ago. The perpetrators entered the church and attempted to break into the candle box which patrons would place coins in for their candles. When they discovered they could not break the lock, they then defecated on the altar cloth and urinated around the pulpit. Simple theft or something more sinister?

In most discussions surrounding race relations in Fiji, the focus remains on the two major races with all other racial groups conveniently boxed as 'others'. Just as discussion on race evolves mostly around Fijians, Indians and Others, the issue of religion evolves around Christianity and 'other' religions. Two of the most common arguments made by self-proclaimed Fijian Nationalists are 1. Fijian rule is mandatory, and 2. Fiji must be made a Christian state.

Any discourse along race, ethnicity, culture or religion must be inclusive and all relevant stakeholders should be recognised, validated and consulted, as oppressing the voices of minority groups further charges the debate. It is particularly important to acknowledge that all people have a right to exist and that they ultimately desire the same or similar ends, irrespective of social, economic, political or spiritual classifications. This is essential if National Unity and an inclusive National Consciousness are to emerge. As Plato postulated over a thousand years ago, *'humanity is the ultimate goal'*. Psychologist Dorothy Rowe puts it best, *"...so we have to begin by asking do we have the right to exist? If we exist we have the right to exist. We do not have to ask anyone's permission to exist."*¹⁰

This paper is, therefore, grounded in the precept that a national and global unity based on the interconnectedness of all humanity is much needed in this world of conflict and tribulations. It is based on the belief that the formal education system remains the most effective means of developing a sense of nationhood, a national identity and a national consciousness as it is the meeting ground for children and adults from all walks of life and all communities. Coleman (1956) so aptly rephrases Dewey's concept of the 'school as a microcosm of society' when he says, *"As is the state, so is the school...what you want in the state you must put in the school."*¹¹

The Education Scene

Curriculum Development

Education remains centrally controlled in Fiji, as it does in the rest of the Pacific. While Independence provided the opening for educational change, the colonial influence on education is entrenched in educational practice. This is evident in the maintenance of the content-based and examination-driven approach.¹² Despite some localisation of the curriculum in content and examinations, the five national examinations and heavy syllabi means that teachers continue to favor a teacher-centred approach which promotes rote-learning.¹³

Since Independence, government expenditure on education has fluctuated. Cokanasiga (1998) argues since 1970, *"...20 – 23% of Governments' annual budget was allocated to the development of education in Fiji"*¹⁴, but in actuality, the figures range between 16 – 21%. Prior to the political crisis of 2000, 20.6%¹⁵ had been allocated to education, but this was increased post-crisis to a cumulative amount of 21.26%¹⁶ translating to almost a billion Fijian dollars. It should be noted that heavy dependency on educational aid continues despite such sums of money being injected into the education system.

This dependency has massive implications on educational change. It usually translates into the short-term employment of foreign consultants who bring with them a skewed view of the socio-cultural, - political and –economic realities of the Pacific¹⁷ and whose impact may be felt in the short-term but very rarely in observable long-term and substantive reform. Very few in-the-field teachers have a hands-on approach to the actual initiation process, since curriculum development is usually reserved for consultants and Ministry officials at the Curriculum Development Unit.

This 'teacher-proof' approach¹⁸ has led to an isolation of teachers, who are made to feel separate and distinct from curriculum development, specifically, and decision-making, in general. Teachers cannot help but feel isolated in terms of support and professional development element as they rarely get the opportunity to participate in workshops and training with Ministry officials and other stakeholders.¹⁹ The current relationship is one in which teachers are made to view the prescription as 'the holy script' rather than as a guide. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) uses its annual school visit to gauge whether students qualify to sit for the national examinations. Moreover, it is not uncommon practice for school management to assess a teacher on their ability (or inability) to complete the syllabus on time and by their students' national examination results.

Diversity in Education

Discussion on issues of diversity began in the early 1900's, but there has been a tendency to recoil from observable commitment that addresses the issue at hand. Many such discussions today mirror conversations that took place decades before. The next section looks at two main categories of diversity; Ethnicity, Religion and Culture; and Gender and Sexuality.

Ethnicity, Religion and Culture

One ongoing debate involves the issue of multiracial schools. Whitehead (1981) records that in 1912; an Education Bill for mixed and interracial schools was "...*withdrawn in the face of strong European Opposition.*"²⁰ This debate resurfaced in 1958, when S.K Sikivou, the deputy Minister for Education argued, "...*compulsory multiracial schooling would lead to a loss in the Fijian Culture and Identity.*"²¹

These sentiments were echoed in 1965, when A.D Patel, the Minister for Social Services attempted to pass a motion on an open door policy'. While indigenous Fijians maintained the argument that this would lead to culture loss, Indians resisted for two reasons, namely the loss of cultural identity and the sentiment expressed by the manager of Wainibokasi Sanatan Dham School in Nausori who said:

...your suggestion ...is not acceptable for the reason that the non-Indians have not contributed towards its [the school's] establishment nor is there a chance of a contribution of others in the future. These schools are symbols of the society that built them. ²²

Almost four decades later, Fiji schools remain segregated even with the Ministry of Education managing and controlling 16 out of 911 schools in the country since 2002.²³ The transparency of the 'open-door policy' remains elusive despite it being mandated by the Constitution.

The 1966 and 1997 Constitutions state that religious denominations and cultural communities have the right to establish, maintain and manage educational institutions and that

...the admission of a place of education...may be administered on the basis of the need to maintain its special character but, subject to that, those concerned in its management must ensure that it is open to all qualified students without discrimination. ²⁴

It has been noted that the number of indigenous Fijians attending Indo-Fijian schools is increasing. These students are required to take Hindi or Urdu (at Muslim run schools), as well as read the holy books and wear the attire of the religious community of that school. In many instances, the general feeling is that religious and community run schools are very particular about students and teachers who are admitted into their schools.

Furthermore, although the Ministry of Education allocates teachers to schools, schools actually have some say in the criterion required of staff members. For example, in Catholic schools, with which I have had much experience, the vast majority of teachers are Catholic or Christian and they are expected to maintain the religious character of the school community. ²⁵

It has been argued that "...*schooling should be multicultural on a planned basis*"²⁶ and that a conscious reform of school policies and practice is needed, in terms of "...*attitudes towards teachers and students of diverse backgrounds [as] this can affect [their] confidence.*"²⁷ The reality is that a school may proclaim an 'open door policy' but continue with their stringent selection practices under the 'cloak of maintaining the special character' of the school community and so continue to legitimate discrimination.

It must be said that while many schools today are pluralistic in nature, especially in urban centers, many still have a large proportion of Indian or Fijian students and teachers. In a research paper of the 1997 Fiji Constitution Review Commission, Geraghty (1998) states, "...42% [of schools in Fiji] still contain over 90% of either Indians or Fijians." ²⁸

Some educational issues emanating from race, ethnic and religious diversity include:

1. Segregated schools existing in two main categories. Government schools and Private schools which are managed by various religious and community organisations;
2. General lack of commitment to pursue multiracial/multicultural schooling despite recommendations being made as early on as in 1912 and repeatedly in the various Education Commission reports;
3. Transparency in the implementation of the 'Open-door' policy remains dubious despite being mandated by 1966 and 1970 Constitutions;
4. Indo-Fijians perceived as doing far better than Fijians (educationally and economically) resulting in the 'Blue Print for Affirmative Action for Fijians and Rotumans';
5. Continued lack of emphasis of culture and languages in curriculum, as these are perceived as unexaminable; and,
6. Planned inclusion of conversational languages (Fijian, Hindi and Rotuman).

Gender and Sexuality

Awareness on Gender issues has come about through the growing concern that gender stereotyping and discrimination continues in the education system. Women's issues have been pushed to the forefront of the education discussion following the ratification of certain sections of CEDAW and the inception of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and Women's Action for Change, as well as Human Rights based NGOs'. While some 'on-paper' commitment to addressing issues of access and equity for girls and women in the country can be seen, it is difficult to see widespread visible evidence of such.

In 2000, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Fiji Human Rights Commission and the Citizen's Constitutional Forum launched a civil rights education booklet, titled 'Your Constitution, Your Rights' in the three national languages of English, Fijian and Hindi. However, there is no apparent implementation process in place and in many instances, the booklets are simply disseminated to school libraries.

In Education, the 2000 Fiji Islands Education Commission Report highlighted the Gender concern. The panel made the following discoveries:²⁹

1. Some progress has been made with regard to the access and participation of girls in education;
2. Boys, especially indigenous Fijian boys are found to leave school early;
3. Girls remain underrepresented in some subject areas, such as Science, Information Technology, Technology and Mathematics;
4. Gender stereotypes and outdated perceptions of girls and women are still found in the existing curriculum;
5. Girls must receive equitable opportunities in accordance with government policies regarding equality and gender;
6. In general, girls acquire fewer scholarships than boys;
7. Girls and women at university remain underrepresented in areas that were previously considered masculine such as Law, Computing, Physics and Mathematics. Girls and women predominate in areas such as the Humanities, Education and Psychology, Literature and Language, Library Studies and Sociology;
8. Women make up less than 25% of the paid formal national workforce;

9. Despite women having the same or higher qualifications than men, they continue to earn less or and fail to reach higher status in the workplace in comparison to men;
10. Men continue to hold higher educational posts. While 57% of primary teachers and 48% of secondary teachers are female, only 22.5% are Head Teachers and 14% are Principals; and
11. Cultural beliefs and attitudes continue to influence social perceptions of gender roles.

The issue of sexuality is not considered at all in the current curriculum, and the topic of ‘Reproduction’ is perhaps only ever discussed in Biology and in some instances, Religious Education. A ‘Family Life Manual’ adapted from a *Regional Workshop on the Development of Instructional Materials on AIDS education* in 1989 in Suva. UNFPA and UNESCO, funded publication of the manual, which was compiled by the Family Life Unit of the Ministry of Education. It is prescribed for secondary school use. In units 3 to 5, it lists homosexuality under the heading ‘*Abnormal Behaviour*’ along with ‘Rape’ and ‘Prostitution’.

The objectives of the lesson on homosexuality include; “*to help students understand that homosexual behavior is abnormal and can be avoided; [and] to realize that homosexuality is sinful, immoral and unhealthy.*”³⁰ Supportive Teaching notes provided include the lists below. Interestingly, the list for effeminate boys is considerably longer than that of girls who are considered ‘tomboys’ and so at risk of developing homosexual tendencies.

Teaching Notes:

* Homosexuality can be avoided. A boy who has girlish behavior should be encouraged to:

1. Mix with other boys of his age;
2. Play with ‘masculine’ toys;
3. Spend more time with his father/ male relatives;
4. Play ‘male’ sports e.g. rugby;
5. Read boys adventure stories;
6. Watch films showing male adventures;
7. Seek help and counseling from a priest or minister;
8. Stay away from other boys who have the same behavior;
9. Wear boys clothing only (No unisex clothing);
10. Listen to music by male artists (NOT MICHEAL JACKSON OR BOY GEORGE); and,
11. Boys who attend all-boys schools should be allowed to attend socials with members of all-girl schools.

* A Girl who has tomboyish behavior should be encouraged to:

1. Act more feminine;
2. Wear girls clothing only (No Shorts or jeans, etc);
3. Do more household chores; and
4. Spend more time with her mother/ female relatives.

* It is important that the boys in the class accept boys who are ‘girlish’ as their equals. This will encourage them to adopt masculine behavior.

(Excerpt from ‘Family Life Manual for Forms 5 and 6, pp225)

In general, homosexuality is considered a controversial issue, which is frequently debated in the Letters to the Editor columns with many discussions centered on the questionable legitimacy of their (homosexuals) existence and the sinfulness of their lifestyle. Most educators prefer not to enter the sexuality discussion. If the issue is raised it is more often than not heterosexist. This is in large part attributed to strong cultural and religious attitudes surrounding homosexuality. These attitudes are

backed up by the considerable power and influence of the Methodist church to which many politicians and senior civil servants belong.

Recently the Director of the Fiji Institute of Technology chose a national conference on Technical and Vocational Educational Training to express his views on safe sex. He said he did not agree with the safe sex discussion as he advocates abstinence. He also said that he would remove all condom vending machines from the school grounds. This same individual also implemented a strict school dress code that required women to wear long skirts or traditional dress only, and not trousers nor shorts. Men were also directed to wear trousers or traditional dress. The University of the South Pacific, while it does not appear to acknowledge same sex relationships when implementing policy, does not prescribe a dress code for its students.

Sexual Minorities Project, a small community service organisation in Suva, Fiji found in a National Needs Analysis (2003) that the extreme vulnerability and marginalisation of the GLBT community in Fiji continues, with lack of access to health, education, housing and other resources meaning that many are socially and economically disempowered. *“Stories that were revealed were sad, touching and demonstrated a ‘living on the edge’ type of existence. Physical violence such as being thrown around or beaten are the common expectations of those living this lifestyle”*.³¹

The SM project is currently working with individuals within the teaching community to initiate research on bullying and discrimination in schools, and secondly, a programme to affirm sexual diversity. It must be noted however, that although there are individuals within the teaching staff, unions and academia who are working on addressing these issues, the response from government and churches has been lackluster at best, and obstructionist at worst.

The discussion on Sex Education is that advocates for a compulsory Sex Education programme at both primary and secondary school, continue to argue on the basis of the continual increase in teenage pregnancy and STIs in primary age groups³². In a discussion between Heads of the two Teachers Unions, the president of the Fiji Teachers’ Union, Mr Balam argued for the inclusion of Reproductive Health education as early as classes 6 and 7. In response, the president of the Fijian Teachers’ Association (whose membership is exclusive to indigenous Fijians) said that he personally did not agree with the inclusion and that the Ministry needed to think carefully before making any curriculum decision on the matter.³³ Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education remains reluctant to implement such a programme.

Multicultural Curriculum: The Missing Link

In its goal to bring people together, education has to do more than to encourage people to adopt the common values of their past. Education must also be able to provide an answer to ‘why’ and ‘for what’ we live together. The task of education is to give everyone the opportunity to play an active role in shaping the future of their society.³⁴

In order to effectively address diversity through education, there is a need for honesty and commitment. Honesty recognises that various forms of diversity exist in Fiji today. Moreover, commitment to addressing the multiple realities that diversity presents is essential in the drafting and implementation of national policy and education. Therefore political will and continued capacity building for policy makers and implementers is vital.

While post-Independence policies in Fiji, were in line with the recommendations of the 1969 Education Commission Report regarding multiracial schooling, Fijian education and cross cultural studies *“...schools and parents concentrated on examination results and ways of improving them, and this [meant]... other national issues like multiracialism in schools and cross cultural studies remained*

largely neglected. Since these were not the issues that the electors were interested in, political leaders ignored them."³⁵

The results of my thesis "*Developing Cultural Identities: Multiculturalism in Education in Fiji*", conducted over 2001 and 2002³⁶; found policy development to be ad hoc. It also established that there is an urgent need for a holistic, future-based approach to developing Educational Policy. At the time of my research, there were four major policy action directives that covered the 2000 – 2020 period. Many objectives overlapped or contradicted each other.

Many students interviewed (both primary and secondary level) were unable to speak their mother tongue. Some indigenous students were unable to name their village and even more had never visited their villages. In a twist, students were able to name religious festivals (of the various communities) which were public holidays, for example Diwali, Eid, Easter, Christmas, Prophet Mohammed's Birthday and so on, but were unable to explain the significance of the festival.

Secondly, the impact of rote learning became apparent when students could only define 'Multiculturalism', but they could not translate the consequences of multiculturalism into their various communities. In addition, a smaller scale research conducted in 2000 on *Community Leaders Perceptions of Multiculturalism in Fiji*³⁷ had similar findings, with some church leaders stating that their multiracial congregation implied that they practices multiculturalism.

More interesting was the attitude of both the Ministry of Education and the Heads of Schools approached towards the topic of my research. First of all, it took the ministry over a year to grant permission for school based fieldwork. In addition to this delay, most Head Teachers and principals who were approached declined to have their school participate they felt the topic was 'too controversial' and that parents would not approve.

It is evident that a better understanding of multiculturalism is needed in Fiji. A more inclusive vision of education would facilitate a better understanding of the concept of multiculturalism in education. This vision should have a realistic and future-based scope. Similarly, curriculum development requires fine-tuning that considers cultural epistemologies, as well as, those of the formal education system through inclusive pedagogies and community participation.

An appropriate model of curriculum development with a future and broad based approach is that postulated by Wylie (1970) who uses the analogy of a tripod to describe the curriculum.

...a curriculum is rather like a tripod with one foot planted back in past traditions, one foot set down in present beliefs and practices, and one foot extended into predicted requirements and hoped-for improvements for the future.³⁸

Such an approach will better enable students and their communities to acknowledge theirs and others' identities and would also take in to consideration cultural continuity and cultural change. This would better enable an education system that looks to the past and present, to determine the kind of future that is envisioned through achievable short- and long-term goals.

Multicultural Education (MC Ed) in Fiji.

In the interests of expedience, I will refer to multicultural education as MCEd. Appropriate research, planning, development and implementation are the corner stones of any curriculum innovation. If these are given due consideration, the benefits of such an approach are limitless. It is important that western models of MC Ed should not merely be 'imported'. Rather they should be used to develop a contextualised model that suits the specific needs of the Fiji situation. This would improve on current failings of the Fiji education system that "...can be attributed in large measure to the imposition of an alien system designed for western social and cultural contexts which are underpinned by quite different values."³⁹

MCEd provides the necessary framework for which an inclusive education system can be developed for a number of reasons, including:

1. It provides a framework that is inclusive and in-line with the philosophy of Education for All (EFA), The Delors Report and Fiji's current Development Plans;
2. It has the ability to address issues of diversity raised by the 1969 and 2000 Education Commission reports;
3. It acknowledges a more holistic definition of diversity that recognises issues which have not previously been considered; such as socio-economic and socio-cultural diversity, sexuality and sexual orientation and special needs education;
4. It is developed on the foundations of education; philosophy, sociology and psychology upon which sound curriculum development and reform can be developed, in context;
5. It is education for Social Justice, which can be used to nurture a national identity, national unity and a national consciousness that will humanise and embrace all citizens of Fiji; and,
6. It considers cultural and multicultural issues and their impacts on education, schooling and the teaching-learning process.

The model for MCEd, presented here, considers the issue of diversity holistically and is based on the premise that a multicultural ideology is the true face of cultural democratic education that is both culturally sensitive and globally relevant. The model is based on the philosophy of inclusiveness and anti-discrimination; the sociology of Fiji's multicultural context and the psychology that recognises the influence of culture, the multicultural experience and the socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political situation that exists in Fiji.

Such a theoretical framework is important as it provides for the holistic development of the child, recognizing that "*...cultural liberty is a vital part of human development because being able to choose one's identity – who one is – without losing the respect of others or from being excluded from other choices is important in leading a full life.*"⁴⁰ Furthermore it builds on the ideology of social transformation, which is essential if education is to play an active role in developing a national consciousness.

Gorski & Covert (1996; 2000) define the goals of MCEd as follows:

- Every student must have an equal opportunity to achieve to his or her potential;
- Every student must be prepared to competently participate in an increasingly intercultural society;
- Teachers must be prepared to effectively facilitate learning for every individual student, no matter how culturally similar or different from her- or himself;
- Schools must be active participants in ending oppression of all types, first by ending oppression within their own walls, then by producing socially, and critically, active and aware students;
- Education must become more fully student-centered and inclusive of the voices and experiences of the students; and
- Educators, activists and others must take a more active role in reexamining all educational practices and how they affect the learning of all students; testing methods, teaching approaches, evaluation and assessment, school psychology and counseling, educational materials and text books, etc.⁴¹

The model, adapted from the initial conceptual framework presented in my thesis, is divided into three phases, which span over the primary and secondary years. It attempts to maintain cultural continuity, while appreciating diversity and change within cultural groups; develop cross-cultural

competency and improve multicultural capacity building. All of which are currently missing. It proposes that it is only by adopting such a holistic approach that education in Fiji can be adapted to bridge the ‘cultural gap’⁴² that exists in education.

Phase 1 covers the pre-school and early primary school years where cultural analysis and literacy⁴³ begins. It continues to about class 6 level although elements are to be integrated throughout the school experience to form 7 level. Students are given the opportunity to learn their own cultures and languages, providing a cultural base on which to strengthen the development of cultural identities as “...children’s attitudes towards their race and other cultural groups begin to form early in the pre-school years.”⁴⁴

Phase 2 is also incorporated at primary school at about class 6 or 7 level. Students begin to recognise the place of their own and other cultures in society and more importantly, the validity and authenticity of other ways of doing and knowing. Students learn something about other cultures which, enables them to “draw parallels between their own and other cultures by identifying similarities and differences.”⁴⁵ This is important as “...young children can develop stereotypic viewpoints of cultures different to their own when similarities among all individuals are not emphasized.”⁴⁶

Phase 3 begins at higher primary level (class 8) or initial stages of secondary school (form 3 and 4). It enables students to place themselves in the regional and global context by recognising how interaction with the outside world results in culture and societal change. Students learn about foreign cultures and international languages and are expected to relate human rights to group rights, cultural rights and indigenous rights.. “The main aim of the multicultural analysis is to nurture future citizens of substance who are not blinded by ethnocentric lens and are able to make rational and objective decisions in the truly multicultural global village”⁴⁷ In this phase, they also gain up-to-date knowledge of conventions to which Fiji is currently party, and the extent to which these have been ratified and integrated into their country of origin.

The model focuses on the redirection of Pacific education that considers cultural survival and sustainability.⁴⁸ The multicultural analysis programme enables the realisation of the objectives of the multicultural society.⁴⁹ This means that students must, upon leaving school, have the capacity to distinguish between cultural identity, national identity and global identity and to engage with the interplay between them. Aurora and Duncan (1986) say that this would serve the students in the following ways;

1. Gain an appreciation of language diversity;
2. Help them understand the world they live in;
3. Help them develop respect for themselves and others;
4. Help remove stereotypes; and most importantly,
5. Foster positive attitudes that are conducive to promoting unity in diversity.⁵⁰

Consequently, the model is constructed on the Fiji Islands Strategic Development Plan 2003 – 2005. The Education and Training, and Gender and Development goals stated here are “Quality education and training for all that is responsive to changing needs”, and to “Develop, address and promote gender sensitive policies, issues and concerns.”⁵¹ The Model is the first attempt in Fiji, at developing a holistic approach to MCEd that embraces cultural ways of knowing and doing within the conceptual framework of formal education.

Developmental Model for the *Multiculturalist* Approach to Multicultural Education⁵²

PHASE 1 (continuous and overlaps onto the second and third phase)

PHASE 2

PHASE 3

Personal platform

National Platform

Global platform

OBJECTIVE:

To develop a personal cultural perspective through establishing the concept of 'self' identity rooted in own culture, religion and language.

OBJECTIVE:

To recognize the authenticity of others (identity rooted in their culture, religion and language. To appreciate similarities and differences)

OBJECTIVE:

To transfer learnt knowledge about 'self' and other cultures and relate this information to the global context.

Key Components

1. Multicultural / Group Analysis
2. Multicultural Literacy
3. Culture Change

Programme of Study areas include:

- Group Rights
- Religious Rights
- Conversational Languages
- Local/ Indigenous Integrated Arts and Drama
- Interfaith religious education/ values education/ virtues project
- Cross-Cultural studies
- Racism & forms of discrimination
- Peace studies/ Conflict resolution
- Ethnic Process Model
- Cross cultural & Multicultural competence

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Key Components

1. Understanding intercultural relationships
2. Globalization
3. Culture Change

Programme of Study areas include:

- Human Rights
- International Languages
- International/ Contemporary Integrated Arts and Drama
- World Religions education/ values education/ virtues project
- Global Cultures
- Racism & forms of discrimination
- Peace studies/ Conflict resolution
- Multicultural competence cont...

It also echoes the philosophy of the Third Pillar of *'Learning: The Treasure Within'*. Professor Zhou Nan-Zhao in his key note address at the 1998, Melbourne UNESCO Conference 'Education for the 21st Century in the Asia-Pacific Region', stated that:

The concept of Learning to Live Together is proposed as 'one of the major issues in education today' in a world of conflicts and tensions...It is a learning supposed to enable people to resolve conflicts by developing respect for other people, their cultures and their spiritual values. It refers to a wide array of knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values of learners to participate and cooperate with others in all human activities.⁵³

The success of any multicultural programme requires a multicultural and inter-disciplinary perspective. This means that teachers must share the vision of an inclusive curriculum. The ability to develop multicultural capacities in students is an important skill that needs to be nurtured. This has implications for teacher education and teaching strategies that must incorporate a variety of ways of teaching and learning, thinking and knowing that will empower teachers and ensure a liberating educational experience.

A multicultural perspective requires the inclusion of local and indigenous epistemologies and their knowledge, wisdoms, teaching and learning approaches, as well as, assessment and evaluation methods. The ultimate goal of multicultural curriculum would be, "...to attach positive feelings to multicultural experiences, so that each child will feel included and valued, and will feel friendly and respectful toward people from other ethnic and cultural groups."⁵⁴

In light of the diversity that exists in Fiji, future-based educational planning must be holistic and inclusive in scope. Taufe'ulugaki (2004) encapsulates what this vision should include. These are listed below:

1. Develop a national approach to language and cultural development and policy in Fiji which includes the priority development and promotion of Fiji cultures and mother tongues;
2. More effective acquisition of English competence through improvements in mother tongue competence;
3. Strengthen and promote cultural identity which develops self confidence and self esteem;
4. Nurture and maintain vulnerable and endangered Fiji languages and cultures;
5. Maintain cultural and language diversity that enrich the human condition;
6. Deepen understanding of, and celebrate, difference;
7. Develop inclusive curriculum in schools that build on commonalities and shared values;
8. Broaden outcomes of education to include important knowledge, skills and values important to all cultural groups in Fiji;
9. Train all teachers to be culturally and linguistically literate in the major languages and cultures of Fiji;
10. Engage communities in cultural transmission; and
11. Develop community and parental understanding of differences and provide cultural and literacy education.⁵⁵

Summary

A multicultural framework that recognizes the interconnectedness of all groups and communities in Fiji is essential for the development of an inclusive national culture and identity that also has space for diversity and context. Such a national consciousness must, by definition, be based on shared universal

values that acknowledge multiple ways of thinking and doing. It would recognise the value of human dignity not only through basic human rights but also in the intrinsic value of a shared existence.

A model for MCEd provides a framework that builds on the philosophy of inclusiveness and encapsulates the sociology and psychology of the diverse learner. It provides a base through, which students learn about themselves in the greater cultural context.

This can help in avoiding the polarization in local communities where parents and disenfranchised communities feel that reaction and separation are the only answer. The rise of narrow identities and reactions (whether nationalistic, ethnic or racial) obviously requires commitment on the part of the education system as a whole. The role of the school in strengthening civic culture as well as public values is something that has been weakened and requires strengthening...the state and its education system cannot afford to marginalize these issues because their cumulative effort erodes safety and stability of the whole polity.⁵⁶

To conclude, it can be said that three home truths must be acknowledged. One, the current content-based, examination-driven focus of education system in Fiji needs to change. Two that centrally controlled education is inevitable given Fiji's socio-economic realities. And, three, that diversity and ever present change must be addressed in education to better prepare students for the realities of a diverse society and world.

In an attempt to "...seriously question the current education system and national development paradigms to identify their shortcomings and develop more culturally appropriate ways of doing things in the education system"⁵⁷, I have proposed a model for MCEd which is constructivist and de-constructivist in nature. It begins by helping students to explore and develop a cultural identity as a Fiji citizen, a Pacific Islander and a global citizen.

Ultimately, an inclusive framework of education can help to bridge both cultural and multicultural gaps in two main ways. Firstly, it establishes the foundation for improved interaction between groups which would go a long way in developing a unified national consciousness. Secondly, better contextualisation of cultural and multicultural grounding could improve the educational experience and therefore impact on students' educational achievement.

In short, Government policies and education cannot avoid the reality of diversity in society, either as a result of historical immigration or work-related migration. The UNDP 2004 Human Development Report is explicit when it states:

There is no trade-off between diversity and state unity; multicultural policies are a way to build diverse and unified states [and]...there is no trade-off between peace and respect for diversity but identity politics need to be managed so that they do not turn violent.⁵⁸

The failure to recognise the challenges of diversity in the 21st Century is a failure to prepare the youth for the reality that society presents. A multicultural approach will pave the way for addressing conflict and building societies that are firmly rooted in democratic principals and citizens who share the virtues of understanding, respect and a commitment to sustainable development in all facets of life. Essentially, the ideal society is one that actively promotes global ethics contextualised into local realities. . This is based on the premise that "*all cultures share a commonality of basic values*"⁵⁹, ensuring Equity, Human Rights and Responsibilities, Democracy, Protection of Minorities and Peaceful Conflict Resolution and Fair Negotiation.⁶⁰

It is by reaching out to one another, that we too create something beautiful to last through the ages”.
Amy Cordova

Notes

- ¹ Norton 1990
- ² Halapua 2001, p21
- ³ Ratuva 2000, In Koya-Vaka’uta 2002, p 17
- ⁴ Ibid
- ⁵ Davis, 2000 p 9
- ⁶ Fijian Affairs Act, p 6
- ⁷ Willoughby Forum 2004, p 3
- ⁸ Ibid, p8
- ⁹ Niukula 1998, p53
- ¹⁰ Rowe 1987
- ¹¹ Coleman 1956, In Fagerlind and Saha 1995, p 123
- ¹² Sharma 2000, p 278
- ¹³ Sadler 2000, p 269
- ¹⁴ Cokanasiga 1998, In Koya-Vakauta 2003, p61
- ¹⁵ Bacchus 2000, p447
- ¹⁶ Ministry of Education 2000, p6
- ¹⁷ Thaman 1999, p 9
- ¹⁸ Sharma 2000, p278
- ¹⁹ Ibid, p 11, 15
- ²⁰ Whitehead 1981, In Koya-Vaka’uta 2002, p56
- ²¹ Ibid
- ²² Ibid, p23
- ²³ Ministry of Education 2002, 10
- ²⁴ Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, Ch 4, Section 39, -2 & -3
- ²⁵ Koya-Vaka’uta 2002, p 24 -25
- ²⁶ Vakatale 1998, p 22
- ²⁷ Subramani 2000, p303
- ²⁸ Geraghty 1998, p4
- ²⁹ Tavola 2000
- ³⁰ Ministry of Education 1990, p221
- ³¹ Sexual Minorities Project 2003, p 19
- ³² Plange 2000, p55
- ³³ Turaga 2004, p5
- ³⁴ Delors Report 2004, p1
- ³⁵ Gaunder 1999, p152 - 153
- ³⁶ Koya-Vaka’uta 2002
- ³⁷ Koya-Vaka’uta 2000
- ³⁸ Wylie 1970 In Connell 1974, p134
- ³⁹ Taufe’ulugaki 2003, p15
- ⁴⁰ UNDP 2004, 1
- ⁴¹ Gorski & Covert 2004, p1
- ⁴² Little 1995, In Thaman 2002, p25
- ⁴³ Thaman 1994
- ⁴⁴ Gomez 1991, p1
- ⁴⁵ Koya-Vaka’uta 2002, p150
- ⁴⁶ Gomez 1991, p1
- ⁴⁷ Ibid
- ⁴⁸ Thaman 2002
- ⁴⁹ Aurora & Duncan 1986
- ⁵⁰ Adapted from Koya-Vaka’uta 2002, p 150
- ⁵¹ Government of Fiji 2002, p 60 -63
- ⁵² Ibid, p 149
- ⁵³ Nan-Zhao 1998, p62

⁵⁴ Dimidjian 1989, In Gomez 1991 p2

⁵⁵ Taufe'ulugaki 2004, p 9

⁵⁶ Vakatale 1998, p45

⁵⁷ Puamau 2002, p71

47 UNDP 2004, p 4

48 World Commission on Culture and Development 1995, in UNDP 2004, p 90

49 Ibid

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Paper presented at the 2004 ANZCIES conference, Melbourne, 3-5 December.