

Lost in translation: Partnerships for authentic education in Papua New Guinea

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Pacific Island countries are recipients of considerable education reform projects, many of which are sponsored by various global donor agencies. These agencies have become partners for development in the region. Research cautions that development projects may have detrimental influences as their designs and delivery often ignore the economic, cultural and social contexts of recipient countries. This paper explores issues impacting on the capacity of educators to lead educational change in Papua New Guinea. While initiatives in capacity building are offered, contradictions within the reform processes identify serious questions about policy development, ownership and capacity building. These contradictions relate to the sustainability of such programmes, collaboration and partnerships between the National Department of Education, universities, donor agencies and scholars who advocate for authentic education for Papua New Guinea.

[Keywords: Papua New Guinea education reform; development education, capacity building]

Introduction

In the context of aid to newly independent countries, partnership for development education is a contestable issue influencing policies and strategies of donor and recipient nations. This has been identified through the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) and *Education for All* (EFA) agendas. Politics and experiences of partnerships for development education have been debated at international conferences¹ and through publications of special journal issues². While the concept of partnership for development education is topical, much of what is known about partnerships is not “written down because it would offend” (King, 2008). This special issue of the *International Education Journal* is timely because it invites scholars ‘to write it down’, while assuming the audience is mature enough to grapple with the issues and refrain from shooting the messenger.

¹ UKFIET International Conference on Education and Development (2009)

² NORRAG News, (2008); International Journal of Education Development (2010)

The fear of ‘offending’ partners in development education relationship is contentious, since it identifies the sensitivity present in unequal relationships. This ‘offending’ agenda challenges the authenticity and ethical tensions present in the negotiating processes between donor and recipients. Too often this dynamic may promote dependent relationships, because local educators are ‘persuaded’ to claim ownership of globally motivated educational reform initiatives that are neither understood nor culturally appropriate (Guthrie, 2011). Some explanation is invited. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews differ epistemologically from Western perspectives. Western systems of knowing assume to know the ancient ‘Other’, and continue to construct the ‘Indigenous’ through Western knowledge and cultural frameworks (Nakata, 2007). Such an assumption is both factually erroneous and culturally ignorant. This paper addresses this dissonance. I am a Papua New Guinean academic employed in an Australian university where I teach Indigenous culture studies, research ethics and education. In this capacity, I am able to reflect on the dynamics of Papua New Guinea and its aid relationship with Australia, its former colonial power. My professional membership of the Australian and New Zealand Comparative and Education Society (ANZCIES) ensures my currency with international development education. I also maintain robust links with Papua New Guinea education through its Secretariat in Port Moresby, and when I frequently return for teaching and research consultancies and community service. In particular, this paper explores the implementation of two education reform projects. These are elementary schooling and bilingual education, and outcomes based education (OBE) as the reformed curriculum.

A Background to Papua New Guinea Education

A 40,000-year traditional educational process existed in Papua New Guinea (PNG) prior to the arrival of Europeans and the introduction of Western education (McLaughlin, 1994). The purpose of traditional education was to provide learners with skills, knowledge and values necessary for social cohesion and communal survival. This was achieved through transmission of pragmatic practices and traditional values. The nature of curriculum was non-competitive, contextual, individually focused and informal (Cleverley, 2006; Louison, 1974). Indigenous knowledge systems maintained knowledge as finite, practical and inherently spiritual. A formal Western education system was introduced with the arrival of various Christian missions during the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, the history of formal Western education in PNG is linked to the various missions (Dickson, 1976, p.21). The church’s major concern with education was one of sectarian salvation along with territorial pacification and western civilisation, with the nature of education modelled on German, British or Australian traditions. Colonial governments supported the missions’ educational aims, since the mission schools served their colonial aims of acquisition and ‘native’ development (Weeks & Guthrie, 1984). It is from this background that the establishment of the Papua New Guinea National System of Education occurred in 1970 (Thomas, 1976).

Papua New Guinea gained its independence in 1975. This became the catalyst to change and expand the education system from elementary to university levels. While motivated by development priorities, the urgency for education was in the creation of an appropriately competent workforce to replace the expatriate staffed bureaucracy. As a result, formal education gradually became perceived as elitist and was responsible for creating an increasing divide between urban (formal) and rural (traditional) populations, resulting with increasing dissatisfaction with the colonial established system of education. In response to this dissatisfaction, two committees were convened to review the appropriateness of the education system, namely the Tololo and Matane Committees. Both committees were concerned with offering a relevant education system, and recommended vernacular as language for classroom instructions and a curriculum which was more orientated to the aspirations of the local community. In particular, Matane in his *Philosophy of Education* identified five national constitutional aims to guide Papua New Guinea education. They are: integral human development; equality and participation; self-reliance; natural resources and environment; and, Papua New Guinea ways (Matane, 1986). Matane's philosophy supposedly continues to be the framework underpinning contemporary education initiatives.

Over the last two decades, Papua New Guinea education has undertaken structural and curriculum reforms inspired by the 1990 *Education for All* and 2000 *Millennium Development Goals*. The aim of the education agenda is the eradication of poverty and achievement of universal primary education (UPE). The Ministry of Education, with the support of international partners (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, the European Union; World Bank and the United Nations) (Oli, 2011) have invested substantial financial and technical resources in achieving these goals by 2015. Ironically and regrettably, Papua New Guinea is unlikely to make observable progress towards meeting the MDG timetable (Government of Australia, 2009; Government of Australia, 2011).

Rethinking development education in Papua New Guinea

Authentic partnerships for development education invite the recognition of power and influence dynamic existing between the former colonised and coloniser. Recognition demands that this dynamic be transparently critiqued. This agenda to educational assistance is both inappropriate and unethical if developing countries are to facilitate authentic economic, political and cultural change. One way to critique the dynamics existing in Papua New Guinea education is through the lens of postcolonial theory (McLaughlin & Hickling-Hudson, 2005). This perspective aims at re-describing and re-interpreting the status quo related to colonisation and its aftermath (Gandhi, 1998). Postcolonial theory has evolved as a theoretical tool for analysis in comparative education, with its focus on how colonial influences and values continue to be embedded in the education system of independent developing countries (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Hickling-Hudson, 2010). Current education systems in these nations continue to be criticised as elitist, lacking relevance to local realities and at variance with indigenous culture, values and beliefs (Crossley & Tikly, 2004, p.149). Postcolonial theory assists scholars to identify these toxic influences as well as to offer the silenced voices a

contribution to the generation of appropriate alternatives to the status quo (Tolley, 2008).

Rethinking partnerships for development education questions broader definitions of international development. Development is an ambiguous concept in social and economic thought, and its application in a variety of contexts is overlaid with political and ideological overtones. Too often traditional interpretations of development include concepts such as progress and advancement, industrialisation and modernisation, as well as the adoption of Western cultures and values (Jones, 1986). Such interpretations support the assertion that the 'miracle' of European success should be diffused into the developing world. The outcome of success is benchmarked by increased economic growth. Accordingly, development education literature is underpinned by philosophies of dependency (Tikly, 1999, p.609). In practice, social and cultural contexts of developing states are ignored because the focus of foreign aid is aimed at generating modern development and 'civilisation' concepts defined by donor agencies.

Dependency theory is an economic theory, and focuses on the extent to which the poorer countries are dependent on the richer (Townsend, 1989). From a postcolonial perspective, aid relationships are considered not so much emanating from the 'generosity' of the donor, but from what are the real gains the donor is deriving from aid. Too often, aid to developing countries seems to ultimately financially enhance the donor (Guthrie, 2002). In particular, while Australia aids Papua New Guinea (approximately \$454 million in 2010 – 2011) (Government of Australia, 2011), it also has gained from considerable investments, and resource ownership and control (McLaughlin & Hickling-Hudson, 2005). Moreover, Australia considers Papua New Guinea a fragile state, whose possible collapse threatens its northern borders allowing increased criminal elements such as drug importation and people smuggling (Cleverley, 2006, p.248). It is in Australia's self-interest that Papua New Guinea does not become a failed state. This is where the irony lies in the aid scenarios to developing countries. The purpose of development is supposedly self-reliance. Authentic development is development without dependency. Yet, aid in the Papua New Guinea context may in fact generate dependency which threatens its national sovereignty, self determination, and traditional values and national spirit (Cleverley, 2006; McLaughlin & Hickling-Hudson, 2005).

Foreign aid to educational innovations should promote independence and sustainability, particularly in the nurturing of a literate and numerate population. Indeed, human capital theory remains a central tenet in education discourse (Tikly, 2004; Fagerlind & Saha, 1989). For some, the purpose of education is merely a 'technical' intervention of inculcating the necessary skills required for economic competitiveness and growth (Tikly, 2004). It has been more than a technical question in Papua New Guinea. Educational policy shifted in the 1970s to create an education system that prepared Papua New Guinea citizens for the modern economy. Indeed, for a minority who advanced through the formal education system, education was seen to be relevant and provided the means and opportunity to engage in the workforce vacated by expatriates. The danger is that

the western education they received ‘colonised’ the way they conceptualised problems and generated possible solutions. Education development, if it is to be authentic, invites an honest critical assessment of the status quo and invites solutions from a variety of perspectives and voices.

Educational Reforms for the New Millennium: The Papua New Guinea Experience

Educational reform in Papua New Guinea has been influenced by global education agendas, in particular, the *Declaration for Education for All* signed in Jomtien in 1990 and affirmed in Dakar in 2000 (Smith, 2005; Cassity, 2008, 2010). Papua New Guinea, a signatory to this declaration, accepted responsibility to promote UPE³. An Education Sector Review was commissioned in 1991, with the responsibility to identify and develop strategies to address problems endemic in the education system since independence (NDOE, 2000). This review confirmed high attrition rates at the primary level, low transition rates at post grade six and ten levels, a largely irrelevant curriculum and pedestrian management and administration. It also identified the declining resource allocation, high unit costs, and imbalance in the allocation of funding to higher education at the expense of other sectors. Radical reform was recommended. In 1993, the national education reform was introduced (NDOE, 2000; PASTEP, 2002). What eventuated was an intensive expansion of primary and secondary education levels, a reform curriculum adopting the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) model, and elementary education with vernacular as language of instruction (in a country of approximately 860 languages). The education landscape was abuzz with reform activities. The finance needed to meet the innovation originated from international donor agencies including the Australian and New Zealand governments, European Union, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, the Chinese and Japanese Governments.

Preparing elementary teachers to teach through the vernacular

Adequate preparation of educators at specific levels for leading and implementing these nationwide reforms was undermined. Some examples of this lack of preparation are necessary. Given the absence of existing early childhood teacher education programmes, large scale recruitment of elementary teachers was undertaken, with many of the newly hired recruits being former ‘dropouts’ from grades six, eight and ten, but competent in a vernacular (Hahambu, 2011). These poorly educated and inadequately prepared teachers were tasked to teach elementary children in the vernacular in elementary grades one and two, and engage in complex processes of language transitions to English in grade three. Such a complex task requires teachers who are proficient in both languages in order to meaningfully engage with the curriculum.

³ Papua New Guinea reform initiatives have been further facilitated by the World Bank’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation in 2003 and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005.

As is globally accepted, teacher education and preparation programmes are important for promoting quality teaching and learning. The process of elementary teacher education in Papua New Guinea is significant. In 1997, AusAID provided technical and funding assistance for elementary teacher education through the Elementary Teacher Education Support Project (ETESP). Adopting an apprentice model, elementary teacher trainers were trained at the Papua New Guinea Education Institute in Port Moresby. These trainers became responsible for training elementary teachers in provinces nationwide. Training modules included self-instruction units through home study, trainer-directed training in residential workshops, and supervised teaching in schools. The expectation was that “the elementary teacher learns by observing the trainer and then gradually taking over full responsibilities” (Hahambu, 2011, p.9). Between 1995 and 2004, 16,000 teachers were trained (NDOE, 2008). The question to consider is: How could pre-service teachers with limited education understand self instruction materials, attend a two week trainer-directed workshops, and then, with some supervision, qualify as registered teachers? This simplistic apprentice model of teacher education contradicts national policy directives which expect elementary teachers to teach for social transformation, stating that social transformation can occur when there is quality teaching which eventuates from quality teachers (NDOE, 2008). It is agreed that teaching for social transformation within the diverse, complex and dynamic social and cultural context of Papua New Guinea is a worthy policy directive. But to achieve this would demand qualified teachers with knowledge of local context, curriculum content and pedagogy.

The absence of appropriate teacher education in early childhood and bilingual education contributed to incompetent teaching, and misappropriation of culturally and nationally prescribed knowledge content. The misconception of bilingual education processes generated tension between teachers at all levels (Hahambu, 2011, p.9). The use of vernacular in elementary schools is being contested by secondary teachers and local communities. They argue that these misunderstandings interfere with students’ learning and have implications for the development of equitable and quality education (Kombra, Hickling-Hudson, McLaughlin & Pillay, 2011). Indeed, authentic education for all in Papua New Guinea is ‘lost in translation’.

Curriculum reform through outcomes based education

Papua New Guinea education adopted outcomes based education (OBE) model in 2000 to replace the so-called ‘irrelevant curriculum’. It is maintained that the rhetoric of ownership and ‘reformed curriculum as home-grown’ reflect misunderstandings of the reformed curriculum policy. Critics of the OBE curriculum argue otherwise.

OBE was introduced...by the controversial Curriculum Reform Implementation Project (CRIP), sponsored by AusAID. CRIP consisted of a team of education consultants...most of whom who had never taught in a PNG classroom...the closest some of them ever got was a brief visit to Wardstrip Demo. They worked with a team of counterparts in the PNG Department of Education, most of whom had never heard of OBE before,

were not aware of its failures overseas, and were not in a position to evaluate its suitability for PNG schools...Instead, there was just an announcement... “we are introducing outcome-based curriculum in PNG” and it was all twisted to make it sound like it was PNG’s own idea...this is how it happened, because I was there at the time. (Hayes, 2007)

For a variety of reasons OBE was inadequately introduced to Papua New Guinea. While OBE was officially launched in 2000, professional development of teachers commenced in 2004, led by the inspectorate and CRIP advisors. Moreover, the distribution of resources and textbooks were not available or sporadically distributed so as to minimise the practicality of professional development (Solon & Solon, 2006). Such unprofessional experiences generated cynicism concerning OBE from teachers being appropriately expressed as ‘*brukim bus*’ (no clear pathway through the jungle) (Hahambu, 2011; McPherson, Clarke & Norman, 2009). Not surprisingly teachers reverted to former approaches to teaching and learning.

The reasons for the inept introduction of OBE to Papua New Guinea teachers is complex but concerns an inadequate appreciation of the context. In creating ‘mass champions’ for implementing the OBE curriculum, awareness workshops were designed with technical and financial support from AusAID through the CRIP project. One major impediment to effective implementation of the OBE curriculum was teachers’ low level of reading comprehension, resulting in rejection or slow acceptance of the reformed curriculum (Solon & Solon, 2006). Teachers’ ability to effectively teach the mandated curriculum largely depends on their discipline knowledge and language of instruction. Quality learning is compromised by the process of interpretation and the translation of ideals as identified in the OBE curriculum into practical and assessable learning outcomes, resulting authentic education being lost in translation.

Capacity building through higher education

To achieve quality teaching and learning on a large scale requires considerable capacity building effort. It is necessary to create a mass of ‘change champions’ across administration and education system (Smith, 2005). Capacity building through higher education is important for sustaining educational reforms. Three Masters’ of Education programmes were offered. This was an important initiative since the provision of so many places for educators to undertake Masters awards was unprecedented in Papua New Guinea. A critique of these Masters programs is appropriate.

Teacher educators

Primary teachers’ colleges provide teacher education and preparation programmes for elementary and primary teachers. Tri-semesters were introduced in an attempt to quickly respond to the demand of the expanding primary and elementary schools. Pre-service graduates were awarded diplomas in contrast to the traditional primary teaching certificate. It was, therefore, argued that teacher educators needed a Master’s degree qualification. Under the Primary and Secondary Teacher Education Project (PASTEP) sponsored by AusAID, the

Master of Education program was offered to selected lecturers from all primary teachers' colleges. This generic Master of Education program was offered by an Australian university in partnership with a local university. PASTEP sponsored tuition, paid a stipend and funded expenses to a university or study centre over two years. Lecturers who missed out had to explore other options (Nongkas, 2007).

Master of Education for curriculum officers

This program was offered by an Australian university in partnership with a national university from 2006 – 2007 through the CRIP project. The curriculum reform was launched in 2000. The purpose of the Masters program was to build the capacity of curriculum writers to lead the implementation of the reform curriculum. The program was offered at the Curriculum Development Division, Department of Education, in Port Moresby. The lack of a stipend generated animosity from students. From their perspectives, any AusAID sponsored programs would normally include travel costs and allowances. Regardless, 13 curriculum officers graduated, most left the division on completion.

Master of Educational leadership

The third Masters program evolved from an identification of needs from a local university. In recognition of its own limitations, it sought advice from Australian partners. A consortium of academics from four Australian universities was organised, and offered their expertise in the form of community service. A Master of Educational Leadership program was offered in 2001 with an annual intake of 20 privately sponsored students. Through this consortium, advanced information technological support was rendered, allowing the local university to develop access to wireless networks. The program has been localised. A graduate undertaking doctoral studies commented:

The program influenced me professionally and personally...in values that guide my communication with colleagues, family and community. It made me cautious of what I say, and who I aspire to be as a person who would respect, value and live a life for others. I believe from the leadership models I have learnt, I think people can recognise these qualities...if I had not participated in the leadership program, I would not have accessed international perspectives on leadership, thus would not have impacted on me. I consider myself very lucky to have invested my own hard earned cash to educate myself in a program like this one, it has opened doors for me. (Graduate, 2009, personal communication)

These reflections demonstrate determination by Papua New Guineans in taking ownership of their professional development. The issue for external donors is to rethink appropriate professional development programmes for local partners, and shift from a dependent and inappropriate model of professional development. As demonstrated in the final model, building partnerships based on personal and professional responsibility and sense of service may assist national partners enhance their capacities to help themselves. Ownership is important for sustainable for capacity building.

Discussions: Partnerships for Development Education in Papua New Guinea

To appropriately implement sector-wide education reforms in developing countries is an ambitious undertaking, but to achieve Millennium Development Goal targets simultaneously is ambitious and complicated (Duke, 2004). Such complicated undertakings demand that ample resources be allocated for program implementation and evaluation. The experiences of the Papua New Guinea education reform identify key dynamics underpinning successful development education. These include ownership and sustainability, the mismatch between international agendas and local context, the complexities of partnerships within development relationships and the possibilities of creating spaces for the voice of the indigenous. Each of these dynamics invites discussion.

Sustainability of educational innovations becomes more likely to occur when there is ownership of the innovation by the local stakeholders. In addition to personal commitment, the availability of appropriate resources is catalytic for successful implementation. When such resources are not provided then the innovation fails. As a response to this, the donor offers more finance in order 'to make the innovation work'. So a situation occurs when the donor insists that what they are financing is appropriate and successful, while the recipient country fears offending the "hand that feeds it" by not responding truthfully (Guthrie, 2002; Hayes, 2007). Sustainability is not possible because the innovation lacked authenticity at its conception.

Another characteristic of 'successful' development education concerns the congruency between international agendas for education reform and their appreciation of the cultural values and historical initiatives of the recipient country. Sadly, this dynamic has been too often ignored in development education. As examples, the *Jomtien* and *Dakar Declarations* encourage the basis of donor support for large-scale education reform. Its fundamental outcomes are increased access to education for all children, increased equity, a curriculum relevant to the needs of all children, and ultimately poverty reduction (Smith, 2005, p.446). These are laudable aims but the irony in the Papua New Guinea context is that they are not new. In the early 1980s, the World Bank funded two large scale aimed at achieving universal primary education (McNamara, 1984; Roakaina, 1984). Progress towards this aim was unsatisfactory⁴. Donor countries rightly evaluate the reasons for aid projects not achieving their stated purpose but too often the boundaries for investigation are confined to issues like poor governance and non-compliance, corruption and the capacity management (Cassity, 2010; Colclough, King & McGrath, 2010). Indeed, these important factors are almost entirely framed as administrative dynamics and there is an absence of assessing the more fundamental reality of national and local ownership and resultant commitment. In other words, too often, the development aid projects are determined to be a solution to problems assessed as appropriate

⁴ Consequently, the Bank in the 1990s, funded half of the costs of education development projects having the same aim (GOPNG & UNICEF, 1996). Once again this goal was not achieved.

by the donor, with little genuine partnership contributions from the recipient country. Consequently, accountability issues with recipient countries must include how national ownership and commitment is cultivated and respected. This implies that donor countries be equally be accountable for the outcome of education aid. Partnership for development to be authentic must embrace genuine listening, respect and recipient ownership for suggested projects. In the case of Papua New Guinea, the narrow focus on UPE has had a negative result, detrimental to the nation and to the quality of education provided in schools. The focus on UPE has led to a noticeable decline in quantity and quality of university graduates (Namaliu & Garnaut, 2010, p.2). UPE cannot be achieved at the expense of ignoring the national Higher Education Sector. Yet, this outcome was determined by aid policy that was not informed by local voices which signalled this likely result.

Papua New Guinea is the largest recipient of Australian Official Development Assistance (Government of Australian, 2011). However, the emergence of new economies by developing countries invites fresh debate on partnerships for development. *The Papua New Guinea – Australia Partnership for Development* (2009) provides a guiding framework for the implementation of the *Port Moresby Declaration* announced by the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008. The principles of this partnership include mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual responsibility for improved development outcomes (Government of Australia, 2009). The experiences of education reform projects suggest that these principles have eluded technical assistance practices.

Authentic partnerships imply that genuine engagement with the local and indigenous voices and a deep appreciation of the contextual dynamics of recipient countries (Crossley, 2010; Tikly, 2004; Tolley, 2008). Sadly, these voices are not heard (Kombra, Hickling-Hudson, McLaughlin & Pillay, 2011). On the contrary, AusAID and New Zealand Aid continue to provide sponsorship to assist elites to pursue higher education in donor countries; the resultant research has been conducted in Papua New Guinea. If the voice of the local is to be heard, it will only occur through mutual respect and ongoing support to have such research published and debated in both local and international contexts.

Conclusions

Disrupting traditional thinking about development education demands interrogating rhetoric of donors and practice of educational assistance. This may be offensive! Critical frameworks can assist to identify tensions and contradictions of development education for postcolonial nation-states. The basis for the generation of these frameworks is a deep appreciation of the cultural and historical context of these developing countries (Crossley, 2010). This involves shifting the mindsets of international experts. While critical perspectives and knowledge of development education are necessary, partnerships in research and teaching based on collegial and ethical relationships may help resolve the messy outcomes of educational reforms. It invites development of an ethical framework that should guide genuine partnerships for development education with

colleagues and neighbours. However, authentic education which addresses local realities maybe suffocated by global agendas. This is the challenging agenda if genuine partnership for development education is to become a reality or merely a minute paragraph lost in translation.

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