The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 20, No 3, 2021
http://iejcomparative.org

Nepali teachers' perceptions of and responses to the impacts of globalisation on their context

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Since the country's democratization in 1950, the Nepali education system has undergone 12 reform cycles. These reforms have been influenced by international policies emerging from the Millennium Development Goals and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals. They have instigated an increasing shift toward Westernized pedagogical practices, particularly learner-centred education. Within the substantial research on the Westernization of the Nepali education system and learner-centred education, there is often a lack of the voice of teachers. The research often positions teachers as passive or resistant implementors of top-down reform rather than proactive, interpretative agents of change. A doctoral study reviewing Nepali primary school teachers' implementation of the School Sector Reform Plan (2009 - 2016) *found a disjuncture between the teachers' support for the philosophy of learner-centred education inherent in the* Plan *and their implementation of these practices in their classroom. This paper conveys the voices of teachers as they describe the factors that they perceived influenced their philosophical support for change. Far from being passive or resistant implementors of policy reforms, their discussions highlight careful consideration of their context and the needs of their students.*

Keywords: Nepal; educational reform; teachers' perceptions; contextual factors

INTRODUCTION

Since the country's democratization in 1950, the Nepali education system has undergone 12 reform cycles. International policies, emerging from global agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have influenced the reforms, with an increasing shift toward Westernized pedagogical practices, particularly learner-centred education (LCE). Studies reviewing Nepali primary school teachers' implementation of the *School Sector Reform Plan (2009-2016)* (SSRP) (Government of Nepal, 2009) found a disjuncture between teachers' support for the philosophy of LCE inherent in the Plan and teacher implementation of the SSRP's practices in their classroom (Government of Nepal, 2012; GFA Consulting Group, 2016). This paper details the outcomes of discussions with Nepali primary school teachers, who describe the factors influencing

their perceptions of educational reform and, therefore, their levels of implementation. The central questions considered in the research were:

> What contextual factors did the Nepali teachers indicate as influencing their perception of the *School Sector Reform Plan (2009-2016)*?
>
> Were the Nepali teachers acting as passive or resistant implementors in the reform process or proactive agents of change?

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE NEPALI CONTEXT

The Kingdom of Nepal was established in 1769 through the forcible unification of several smaller kingdoms (Gaige, 2009). Over the following two centuries, various Hindu dynasties ruled the Kingdom. In that time, a caste system was established, creating an inequitable, entrenched, hierarchical social structure (Gaige, 2009). Nepal's population and cultural structure are defined by the diversity of its 125 different castes and ethnic groups, with a total of 123 different languages spoken (Lawoti & Hangen, 2013). The caste system supports deeply-rooted exclusionary practices that disadvantage particular groups and influence every aspect of the structure of Nepalese society, including education, resulting in inequity, marginalization and oppression (von Einsiedel et al., 2012).

The compounding impact of these practices resulted in a civil war (1994–2006). Thirteen thousand Nepalese lost their lives, most of whom were from villages in rural regions of Nepal (von Einsiedel et al., 2012). The peace agreement in 2007 established a UN Security Council Mission for four years to coordinate the international efforts to help Nepal make the transition to peace and development (Bhatta, 2011). Nepalese society became saturated with UN staff, policies, and directives. Concurrently, multiple international non-government organisations (INGO), non-government organisations (NGO) and businesses flooded the nation to assist with the post-war rebuild. In the process of helping with aid and capacity building, these outside influences exposed the citizens of Nepal to alternative ways of being. Nepal's historical and political context provides a unique environment for the examination of Westernization, which is the focus of this research. The rapid rate of exposure, through INGOs, NGOs and business, combined with the global phenomenon of the internet, facilitated an experience of holistic change for teachers.

As already noted, the education system of Nepal, established through democratization in 1950, has undergone multiple reform cycles. The reforms have often been shaped by INGOs and underpinned by financial support for implementation from various governing bodies (Bhatta, 2011). The reforms increasingly focused on a shift to Western ways of education that were seen to be the way forward for Nepal's development and progress towards modernity (Bhatta, 2011). Over time, such a focus has created a pervasive view of the superiority of Western education and an undermining of the validity of local and national forms of learning and education (Eikland, 2018). Several researchers have investigated the impact of Westernization of the Nepali education system. Largely, their research foci pertain to the impact of educational reform on equity and access to education (Carney et al., 2007); the impact of an unstable political arena on teachers' adoption of educational reform (Shrestha, 2011); the cultural dimension of teacher role and its influence on teachers' beliefs about

their role in the classroom (Parajuli & Wagley, 2010); adult education and access to higher education (Robinson-Pant, 2020); decentralization of the curriculum (Edwards, 2011); and limited access to resources and training (Ram Bhatta, 2013). Much of this work positions teachers as passive or resistant to change and focuses on the barriers within the established political, social, and cultural contexts.

The specific reform implementation which this research investigated was the SSRP, which aimed to improve students' access to quality education in line with international definitions of "quality" from the *Education for All* policy (UNESCO, 2014). The most recent reform, the *School Sector Development Plan (2017-2023)* builds directly on the previous plan by reiterating key goals of quality education, although is now based on the SDGs. Changes to the classroom practices of teachers are specifically addressed in the goals of the reforms whereby teachers are expected to: "foster children's all-round development" (Government of Nepal, 2009, p. 6); "promote a child friendly environment in schools" (p. 13) "employ flexible learning approaches to respond to diverse needs and to address learners' individual pace of learning" (p. 13). The language in these goals can be traced directly back to international policies that are underpinned by Western education approaches, particularly the philosophy of LCE in line with characteristics outlined in Schweisfurth (2013).

The LCE based approaches, such as child friendliness and being flexible and responsive to student needs, are significantly different to traditional Nepali teachers' teaching practices, which were described by Eikeland (2007) as "didactic" and by Bista (2011, p. 4) as typically "teacher centred, instructors mostly lecture the subject matter, even in primary level". Evaluations of Nepali teachers' response to the SSRP at the 2012 midpoint of the reform described teachers' implementation of the practices as limited at best (Asian Development Bank, 2012; Department of Education, 2012, 2013). A review of these evaluations highlighted a noticeable absence of their voices or acknowledgement of the rapid process of change that they were experiencing (Eikland, 2018). The reform process was seeking significant change from teachers in terms of their classroom practices; however, it must be acknowledged that change, as a result of the rapid exposure to globalization outlined above, was occurring for the Nepalese on all levels—social, political, economic, cultural and ideological. The gap in the literature that this article reports on is the teachers' perceptions of the impact of these broader contextual factors on them, their students, and their classrooms.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The data discussed in this paper has been drawn from a larger doctoral study that investigated Nepali teachers' beliefs about their experiences of changing pedagogical practices to meet the demands of SSRP educational reform (Ham & Dekkers, 2018). The data was gathered in 2015 and had ethical clearance (project number 14/09-192). The research process was guided by an exploratory mixed method design (Doyle et al., 2016) in which teachers participated in three different types of data collection across three phases of the research. This process enabled triangulation of data from which conclusions were drawn (Carter et al., 2014; Denzin, 2012). The first phase of data collection was a survey (n=327 primary school teachers from 24 schools in Kathmandu valley) that enquired about teachers' beliefs regarding the underpinning philosophies of LCE and the child-friendly practices they were being asked to adopt to meet the reform

goals. The survey results indicated that over 96% of teachers agreed with the ideological underpinnings and child-friendly practices associated with a learner-centered approach inherent in the SSRP reform being introduced into their context. They also acknowledged the differences between their currently accepted authoritarian role in the classroom and the learner -centered role expected in the reform but supported the change required of them to become "learner friendly". The second phase consisted of observations of teachers' classroom practice (n=15 teachers from six schools across a range of year levels 1-5, and subjects Maths, Science, Nepali, and English) to identify to what extent they were implementing the specified child friendly, flexible reform practices in their teaching. The findings from the classroom observations were that the teachers were not observed to be utilizing the learner-centred practices in their classrooms: a finding similar to those reported in the Evaluation reports of the reform (Asian Development Bank, 2012; Department of Education, 2012, 2013; GFA Consulting Group, 2016).

The third phase, which is the focus of this paper was based on focus group discussions (n=25 teachers from six schools with a range of ages, years of teaching experience, and genders) where teachers were asked to examine in depth their experiences and observations of the changes in their environments. They were also asked to comment on the contradictory findings from phases one and two of the research, namely the dichotomy between teacher support for the philosophy and practices of LCE and their limited application of these practices in their classrooms. In the focus groups, the teachers explained the systemic and cultural factors that they considered limited their implementation of change in their classrooms, despite their agreement with the notion of learners being at the center of the learning process (Ham & Dekkers, 2019; Ham, 2020). They also outlined factors and their engagement in a process of rationalization that had impacted their beliefs that resulted in their level of agreement in the learner-centred agenda. Data from classroom observations and focus groups were analyzed following Braun and Clark's (2006) thematical analysis protocol. In short, this included the author transcribing the data and generating initial codes. These codes were then checked across all transcripts to identify emergent themes. After the themes and codes were reviewed again, the themes were named, and a representative quote selected. The findings presented in the next section purposefully incorporate these quotes to ensure teachers' voices are accurately represented and heard.

FINDINGS

This paper focuses on one of the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the focus group discussions: the contextual factors the teachers perceived influenced them, their students and their classroom and, therefore, impacted their implementation of the reform agenda.

From the discussions, five contextual factors were identified. These are listed and defined in Table 1. Each factor is further discussed with extensive incorporation of the representative quotes from the teachers, developed as the final step in Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis process. The decision to emphasize the teachers' voices and minimize the authors' interpretation was purposefully made to fill the previously mentioned gap in the literature, namely the absence of the Nepali teachers' voices.

Table 1: Theme: Influences on teachers

Changes in Nepali society	Definition
Globalization	Ideas and information that come from outside of Nepal that impact Nepali people's beliefs about the purpose of education
Modernization	The impact that the passing of time has on beliefs and practices
Cultural identity	Change in Nepali cultural identity including loss of traditional culture
Access to information	Access to the internet and social media and the impact on teacher role
Student change	Teachers' observations of change in their students

Globalization

Teachers discussed how globalization and an increased level of information sharing has changed the landscape of Nepali society, Nepali culture, and the education system. Overall, they commented that there had been changes to their social mindsets because of the concepts they called globalization:

> Globalization has changed our society. It has changed our thinking process. It has changed our students' behaviour, teachers' behaviour, as well as society. Everything has changed because of globalization. Globalization is very good, though it has some bad demerits also but there is more merits of globalization." (FG 3).

> In the main, these changes were viewed as "helpful" and "good" (FG 5).

The teachers suggested that, as a result of viewing education systems on a global scale, they now held a different motivation and perceived outcome for their teaching compared to their previous purpose, which focussed on strict behaviour management to reinforce hierarchical roles and rote learning for success in examinations. They suggest now, though, that "It is our intention to teach them life: how to live with the global context, how to survive, how to struggle, how to prove themselves in global contexts" (FG 2). These words directly relate to the global job market and migration patterns for which they were now preparing their students. This was particularly relevant to the employment landscape their students were facing as many would leave Nepal to find work. The teachers considered that they were now preparing their students for an international employment market: "They will gain a skill wherever they live in the world, they can live by their own skill and compete wherever they live in the world" (FG 2).

The teachers appeared to hold an assumption about the role education played in Western lifestyles, where education was seen as foundational to development:

> We can see that clearly the development and the successful progress going on in Western countries is because of education. Education is the main basic support and background of all the development. In every infrastructure and every development, the main supporting sector is education. We have a notion that each and every

> people in Western countries are rich and powerful and they do not lack anything and we know that's all because of education." (FG 5)

Here the teachers were commenting on their perception of the level of access to and the quality of education in the West compared to their educational experiences in Nepal. It was evident that they identified strong links between education and development reflective of similar discussions in international policy such as the SDGs. The teachers discussed how these viewpoints about Western education had impacted their beliefs about the type of education that should be implemented in Nepal.

Conversely, the teachers levelled criticism at the Nepali societies' lack of capacity to critically analyse their holistic adoption of information sourced from international environments. "We get every necessary and unnecessary thing from the West. We have to be selective, but we don't have such capacity. We follow without knowing the result, we believe and follow it without judging it" (FG 3). These comments support the perspective that, although generally complimentary about the impact of outside ideas, the teachers were critically analysing the educational reforms being imposed on them in terms of whether it was a wholesale adoption of Western practice or a positive move towards development.

Modernization

Teachers viewed change as "positive . . . generation after generation, changes should come and bring change" (FG 6) and inevitable. "The time is changed" (FG 4) was frequently used as an explanation as to why the survey results indicated high levels of teacher agreement with the reform goals. They discussed a range of impacts that "time" had wrought. They also described the impact of the modern mindset of seeking economic advantage "the focus has shifted to things like technology and high class and now lots of money; people focus on that now" (FG 5) and the change in religious expectations, "In the old days Nepalese are very very religious and traditional. But now days the children have more freedom. It is different from the parents' days, the elders' days, the traditional days" (FG 6). They observed a change in social expectations of character and morals "Because different morals are there even student character has changed, every social aspect as well has been changed, it has all been changed" (FG 2). Although these comments again indicate an analysis of the changes occurring in their context, the Nepali teachers reported these observations as neither negative or positive but as fact—inevitable.

Cultural identity

On a more sombre note, the teachers recognized that all these global influences and changes, despite their positive future focus, were resulting in a loss of cultural identity for the Nepalese. The teachers expressed concern about the impact of change they observed in Nepali society and culture stating: "It is in a confusion state. I do not completely blame the West, because all we are getting from the West" (FG 3). They predicted that, rather than improving, in the future the identity confusion would only become magnified:

> People like to copy others and after that they remain in the middle—not quite Nepalese and not quite Western. Maybe in the future they will have an identity crisis: whether that person is actually Nepalese or another Western people. We

> should learn good things from others but not that much that you are losing yourself. (FG 5)

They were wrestling with the questions around loss of culture and what their response should be.

> How can we ignore the importance of globalization and how can we forget our originality? The explosion of knowledge, the technology, everything we are getting from the West. But only the concern is the culture, people are forgetting their culture. That is a problem. (FG 3)

The teachers did not propose a solution to the loss of culture, but did, as outlined in the following section, hold a positive outlook on changes in students' learning.

In contrast to their concerns about the loss of traditional culture, teachers commented positively on the level of freedom their students now have to think beyond traditional caste structures. The teachers frequently noted that students were now able to consider a range of career options not limited by caste. They perceived that this was due to the increased focus on equity, caste, and gender occurring in Nepali society and law. "Some students, they say, when I finished my studies and I become higher, then I become the minister. They have the vision" (FG 3). They felt a sense of duty to empower their students and give them voice in their society for their future.

> It is our duty to make our students more capable of speaking in front of everyone, so when they raise the questions, they have confidence, power to speak in front of others. We believe it is good to get questioned by the students. (FG 2)

The comments appeared to be based on their desire to avoid replication of their experiences as students, which they did not view as positive. "We want them to be more friendly. We want to give them a type of education not what we got in our time that was strict." (FG 6) To this end, the teachers agreed that students are now more likely to become active citizens as they are empowered to interact with each other and the schooling community:

> These types of activities make the students perform in the future. They become more courageous. The interaction will happen in the classroom . . . and will help them to perform in front of the mass. It teaches them how to deal with different difficulties and how to deal with different problems. That's the idea of the reform. These changes are making the students easier for the future. (FG 2)

Access to technology

The teachers also commented that the students, themselves, had changed and went on to discuss several negative and positive impacts they had observed about their students' learning. Their observed changes had prompted the teachers to adjust their classroom practice to accommodate the students' needs. In this vein, they discussed an increase in their students' access and use of computer devices. They identified the use of the internet and social media as impacting student learning and the role that they, as teachers, played in the classroom. They highlighted that the use of social media was an increasingly dominant information source, stating that, "Social media also works a lot in their learning process, in at least they have been active and been moving towards that dimension, to the social dimension. The things which they have not learned from school they have learned from the outer society" (FG 1).

In addition, teachers saw access to social media contributing to changes in their students' study habits, "Since technology has been invented, most students have been using it and they are not studying, they are not focussing on their study. They are different, they know things, they see films, games, movies from different environments" (FG 4).

Teachers also noted seeing changes to the level of respect they were given by students. They outlined changes in their role as teachers, noting the shift from being a respected source of information to being ignored as a reliable source of students' information. "They can use IT no? They can ask Facebook only and all, so they don't have to respect us" (FG 1). They also expressed concern about the way students were misusing information where they noted a rise in the incidents of plagiarism in their students' work, "So when I make them write up, they say that they all copy from there (the internet). They don't have their own ideas. They write from the net" (FG 5). This comment again indicated that the teachers were analysing changes in their students and in their role as teachers as a result of contextual factors, particularly the increasing use of ICTs.

Conversely, teachers highlighted positive perceptions about the changes in student learning styles and engagement in their classrooms. They indicated that when they implemented new teaching practices, there had been noticeable changes in their students' learning based on: the interactions students were having with each other—"Most important is the group work. Then the works can be completed very well. Work completion will be very timely and easily" (FG 1); classroom activities, creating a "Lovely atmosphere . . . a favourable atmosphere to learn more" (FG 4); and through creative opportunities, "In our time there was not any creativity. I was not given any creativity. But now the students, we are letting our students to show their creativeness" (FG 2). Though these quotes are mainly in relation to group work and creative approaches, the teachers' discussions of the impact of these different methods of teaching indicated that they were concerned with development of their students' wider skills, such as confidence, collaboration, enjoyment of learning, and creativity rather than just knowledge of the content required for assessment. The comments also indicated that, despite the finding from the observations, some teachers were implementing the new practices.

DISCUSSION

The 2016 evaluation of teachers' responses to the SSRP stated that "although teacher training in content and method were provided under the SSRP, new learning methods have not been transferred to the classroom" (GFA Consulting Group, 2016, p. 3). The report provided no insights into the teachers' perspective of the reform, nor any further explanation of their role in its implementation. By silencing teachers' extensive consideration of their contexts, their understanding of the purpose of education, and their consideration of their students' needs within and beyond Nepal, the teachers were positioned as passive and, potentially, barriers to improving the quality of the education of Nepali children when, if fact, the opposite is true. The discussions with the teachers in the focus groups, as seen in the representative quotes above, suggest that, rather than being passive or resistive implementors, the teachers were clearly analyzing not only the educational changes but the broader societal factors impacting their roles and classroom dynamics. The teachers highlighted their understanding of the connectivity between

global events and actions, changes in the local Nepali society and the global marketplace, and how this impacted their individual beliefs and understanding of themselves as teachers and their students in this context.

The two leading international organizations currently working towards the implementation of quality education, on which the SSPR was based, are UNESCO and the OECD. A comparative analysis of their respective policies, embedded within the 2015 SDGs and 2018 PISA frameworks by Vaccari and Gardinier (2019) found two distinct conceptualizations of the purpose of quality education. Both were seen to "actively envisage a world beyond today" (Vaccari & Gardinier, 2019, p. 80); however, the OECD policy focused on increasing students' knowledge and skills as they pertain to developing capacity to contribute to the global work force, whereas UNESCO's policy focused on the central attitudes and values that preference human dignity and a common humanity. Although the data from this research was gathered in 2015, the year the SDGs were released and prior to the introduction of the OECD PISA Global competence framework, the Nepali teachers raise both these imperatives in relation to educating their students for the future.

Their responses showed that they are conscious of the change in their role and how they now need to prepare their students to both compete in a world beyond Nepal and to actively engage in Nepali cultural and societal landscapes. The teachers outlined the necessity to equip their students with the confidence and skills to challenge traditional caste structures and to feel free to pursue a career of their choice. The teachers' discussions suggested that they are influenced to change their classroom practices as a response to multifaceted changes in society and the world, rather than as a result of the change demanded by the national educational reform. In this sense, the teachers positioned themselves as actively responding to the results of changes within society and in their students rather than simply responding to the requirements of the SSRP educational reform.

This positioning occurred with reference to factors they were observing outside of Nepal, inside Nepal, to the passing of time, and through their own reflexive consideration of the changes they were witnessing. This reflexivity was particularly evident in their observation of changes in their students. They made comparative statements about their experiences in school and how allowing students to be creative in groups facilitated achievement but also created a different atmosphere in their classroom. Rather than being threatened by the fact that the students had access to a wider source of information, the teachers saw both the benefits and challenges of this access and were trying to respond to the shift, always keeping in mind what was best for their students. These careful considerations of their past and present context and their students' needs indicated that the Nepali teachers were acting with agency rather than being passive implementors.

The literature suggests that the type of reflexive practices described above are what constitutes teachers' agency within a reform setting. Biesta et al. (2015) explained that teachers' reflexive evaluation includes: a teacher's past; their consideration of structural and cultural contextual factors and materials available; and their projected long- and short-term goals of education. In her study of Nepali teacher agency, Eikeland (2018) suggested that each individual in a society can purposefully act and that these actions can impact the structures of the environment of which they are a part (p. 50). Like

Biesta et al. (2015), Eikland highlights how one's past, current and future experiences and perceptions impact one's evaluation of externally proposed change.

In this study, Nepali teachers referred to all these elements of evaluation: past, context, and purpose. Comparing their responses to the research suggests that the teachers were exercising agency in evaluating and shaping their personal and collective responses to the SSRP, and that their actions to implement or not to implement the national educational reform were the result of careful analysis. This perspective repositions their role in the educational reform from simply responding to, resisting, or implementing international education policy agendas through the SSRP reform to that of active, informed agents of change. It also emphasizes the importance of including teachers in guiding the design and process of educational reforms rather than viewing them as non-responsive, as the GFA Consulting Group's evaluation suggested in the Nepali context.

The potential for teachers' agency in an advisory role as part of educational reforms was evident in the work of Spreen et al. (2019). They proposed that policy design and improvement strategies would be impacted positively when teachers are enabled to contribute their on-the-ground knowledge of their contexts. Their study goes one step further by providing evidence that teachers' inclusion in developing teacher standards and professional norms not only improves policy but also acts as teacher professional development, which has a direct impact on teachers' motivation and their capacity to reflect on their practice (Spreen et al., 2019). Like this study, Spreen et al.'s (2019) work values the teachers' reflexive consideration of their experiences in situ, rather than preferencing a top-down implementation of reform.

The findings from this study add to the research that emphasizes the importance of not viewing policy development and directives as a linear process with teachers as passive responders and end users. Instead, it is suggested that the process should be seen as dynamic and cyclical (Spreen et al., 2019) with teachers reflexively considering and conceptualizing change in their context and responding appropriately for what they perceive as the good of their students. In the wider study, not reported in the findings above, the Nepali teachers themselves advocated that they should play a pivotal role in the design and implementation of future reforms, and in any training designed to develop the skills of Nepali teachers.

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to explore what contextual factors Nepali teachers perceived influenced their response to the SSRP education reform and whether they were passive implementors or resistors in the reform process, or if they were acting as proactive agents of change. Where discourse on reforms of education policy, curriculum, and pedagogy tends to focus on the impact of such changes *on* teachers, the Nepali teachers' discussions suggest that teachers actually undergo a wider, less structured, but perhaps even more powerful, lived and cyclical process of consideration of the changes and their impacts. This was evident in the teachers' considerations of the cultural and societal shifts in Nepal, how they and their students are living through and influenced by the impact of external factors, and how they responded to these changes in their classrooms. It is argued that the teachers are intuitively responding, not only to the imposed education reform but also to their own understanding and lived experience of globalization by becoming agents for change in their classrooms. They discussed their

ability to read the global landscape and interpret the realities not just *for* their students but *with* their students, as they respond to inherent shifts in their students' increased access to the outside world and their own personal desire to prepare their students for a future vastly different to their own lived experience.

The teachers' perceptions of their role in preparing students for an unknown future in a globalized world focused on fostering the skills and empowerment needed to meet challenges and compete; to stand up for equity; and to have a vision beyond societal expectations of a set role. One of the limitations of the study was that all data was collected from teachers within Kathmandu Valley. Although teachers were sourced from a range of school types, the voices of rural and remote teachers are not reflected in this study. These teachers have traditionally been reported as the most resistant to change but, as with the teachers in this study, we would need to hear their voices before making assumptions about the agentic role they play in their context.

Given that the discussions reported in this study were drawn from data collected from teachers in 2015, it was surprising to see the alignment of the teachers' responses with the language and intent of current UNESCO and OECD policies. This and other lessons learned from listening to the voices of the Nepali teachers about their experiences of a reform process are a reminder that the implementation of large-scale reform is ultimately enacted by teachers, and that teachers respond to the required changes through considerations of the wider cultural and social environment and the perceived needs of their students, often pre-empting global policy agendas. The findings of this study also emphasize the importance of including teachers' voices more directly in a cyclical reform process rather than implementing linear, top-down policy directives.

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The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 20, No 3, 2021
http://iejcomparative.org

Deep change in low-resource classrooms: Data-driven teacher professional development for educators from Burma using a choice-based approach

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Under its democratically elected civilian government, teacher education in Burma was poised for change. The Burmese Ministry of Education, together with their development partners, had ushered in an era of system-wide education reform. This reform redefined the role of teachers, overhauled how teachers were to be trained and supported, and was on course to installing increased teacher accountability measures across the country. The centerpiece of reform efforts pertaining to educators was the Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF), which was developed through a multi-year process culminating in the publication of robust "beginning level" indicators in 2019. This study evidences the existing competencies of Burmese educators employed in Migrant Learning Centers on the Thai-Burma border through enrollment in a comprehensive in-service teacher - training program, which utilizes the TCSF. Participants (n=132) enrolled in a 10-month teacher-training program based on TeacherFOCUS's Learn-Choose-Use Approach. Overall, participants improved by 15.34% across

ten observed and eight knowledge-based teaching competencies when comparing baseline and endline evaluation results. Significantly, teachers exhibited the greatest gains when presented with different options of how they could improve. This study affirms key aspects of teacher professional development that should be considered in low-resource contexts: teacher ownership, transparent accountability measures, place-based instruction and coaching, high-quality feedback and modeling, contextually relevant design, and strong professional relationships.

Keywords: migrant education; Burma education; teacher professional development; Thai-Burma border; Southeast Asian teacher competencies

INTRODUCTION

Educational development organizations and ministries of education continue to look for the panacea that can efficiently and effectively upgrade teacher performance. Historically, attempts have been made using a formula consisting mostly of increased accountability measures, many of which use student test scores as a proxy for teacher performance. Teacher quality improvement is especially challenging in low- and middle-income countries because educational resources are more likely to be scarce, teachers have generally received less training, and much is demanded of teachers in addition to providing instruction (Popova et al., 2016). Authentically improving teacher quality and being able to evidence the impact is elusive as there is often opposition to reform by local actors, difficulty accurately measuring results, and insufficient time to capture the full impact (Bruns et al., 2019). Over the past decade, global education priorities have shifted from supporting "access to" education to ensuring "quality of" education. This is shown in the pivot by the United Nations 2nd Millennium Development Goal to "achieve universal primary education" to the 4th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 4.2 to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2020). With this increase in scope, educators are now required to be competent in a wider range of teaching skills to meet the diverse needs of students. Additionally, SDG target 4.C highlights the need to increase the supply of qualified teachers in low-resource settings. It is clear that effective teacher professional development and capacity building will play an even greater role as the targets and roles of educators are expanded.

In an in-depth study of 65 countries and their corresponding teacher education systems, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that in all high-performing education systems, teachers were the most influential component in improving educational outcomes, and teachers themselves were often involved in the improvement process (Schleicher, 2012). A first step towards leveraging teachers as change-agents within education systems is to identify and articulate a vision of who and what a quality teacher is. This can be accomplished in various ways; one of the most common is through the development of a Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF). Across the world, individual countries and regions are adopting teacher competency standards and their associated frameworks to clearly define teacher roles and develop metrics for the evaluation of teachers. An example of this is the *Southeast Asian Teacher Competency Standards Framework* which was developed in 2018 by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, which comprises 11 ministries of

education in the ASEAN region, including Burma.[1] This collaborative document was developed to "be a helpful guide in improving the performance of teachers across the region… [and] to address the evolving demands of the teaching profession" (SEAMEO, 2018, p. 4).

Teacher education reform in Burma

Under the democratically elected civilian government,[2] teacher education in Burma was poised for change. Beginning in 2012, the Ministry of Education initiated the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) towards reforming the national education system to meet both ASEAN and international standards for quality teaching and learning. The CESR found a widespread reliance on memorization-based teaching methods, confirming the prevalence of traditional teaching practices cited in education literature on Burma (Lwin, 2015). In addition, such teacher-centered methods were found to be linked to a national focus on standardized exams. Specifically, the CESR Phase 2 report found that pre-service teacher trainers relied heavily on rote-learning and had difficulty integrating problem solving and critical thinking into their instruction. The report also found that parents' and students' traditional views of education added barriers to reforming teaching practice (Government of Myanmar, 2015).

In 2015, a process to develop Burma's first national TCSF was undertaken with the support of UNESCO's Strengthening Pre-service Teacher Education in Myanmar (STEM) project. The TCSF for beginning-level teachers was finalized in 2019 after a rigorous process, which included an open call for feedback from local and international education actors, field testing, and a vertical consultation process involving teachers, principals, district and state educational authorities, and national policy makers. The TCSF, together with the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework, were positioned as the cornerstones of pre-service and in-service teacher development. Collectively, they were intended to guide and assess the improvement of teaching quality across the country (Lall, 2020). The development of the TCSF was accompanied by an expansion of pre-service teacher training at education colleges from two to four years as part of the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016-21, which sought to strengthen teacher quality assurance and management, improve the quality of pre-service teacher education, and improve the quality of in-service teacher professional development (MOE, 2016). There is still more work to be done to articulate the competency standards for "experienced", "expert", and "leader" levels of teachers, however, this process is at an impasse due to the current political environment. A critical role of the TCSF is to recognize the existing competencies of educators by evidencing their skills. This aspect also has implications for teachers working in parallel education systems, such as those serving in Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) in Thailand.

[1] This paper uses the name "Burma" to denote the country in solidarity with oppressed political actors and activists who oppose the policies and practices enforced since the coup d'état led by the Tatmadaw military regime beginning 1 February 2021.

[2] "government" is used within this paper to refer to administration by the democratically elected, civilian governments serving from 31 January 2011 to 31 January 2021, under the *2008 Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar*.

Education for Burmese migrants in Thailand

Burmese parents have long migrated to Thailand due to a variety of political, conflict, or poverty-related push factors and/or economic and vocational opportunity pull factors (IOM, 2016). While all non-Thai children are able to attend Thai government schools under Thailand's landmark 2005 Cabinet Resolution and the resulting Education For All (EFA) policy, Thai government schools are often perceived as a less optimal choice for migrant families planning to return to Burma (Tyrosvoutis, 2019), thus, a network of MLCs has been established throughout Thailand which provide an alternative and complementary education pathway for the children of Burmese migrant workers.

The focus of this study is Thailand's Tak province, which borders neighboring Burma, and is home to 66 MLCs serving over 11,000 migrant children (MECC, 2019). Though unregistered and, therefore, illegal in the eyes of Thai authorities, MLCs play a critical role by providing recognized education in the mother tongue of migrant children through the provision of national board exams accredited by Burma's Ministry of Education (Lwin, 2005). Should these children return to Burma, they would be able to continue their education in government schools. While this secures the educational future of migrant children, an enduring gap is the recognition of migrant teachers. A survey of 223 migrant teachers revealed that formal recognition by a government was the most frequently cited need, even more so than increased salary which, on average, is currently half of Thailand's minimum wage (Tyrosvoutis, 2019). To address this gap, substantial professional development with associated assessments has been provided to migrant educators to verify their teaching competencies in hopes of creating a pathway for their certification.

In the absence of a system-wide governing body to structurally support unified decision-making and continual professional development, MLCs are managed by a small number of community-based organizations that work in partnership with the Migrant Education Coordination Center (MECC) and Tak Primary Education Service Area Office 2 to fill this gap. The MECC provides oversight to MLCs in Tak province together with the following migrant education stakeholder organizations: Help Without Frontiers Thailand Foundation (HWF), the Burmese Migrant Teachers Association (BMTA), and the Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC). Teacher professional development for educators employed in MLCs is provided by various technical organizations, the largest being TeacherFOCUS, which conducted this research study.

Recommendations for teacher professional development in low-resource contexts

As described by Burns (2016) and the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), three interrelated aspects form the triad needed for improved learning outcomes: quality teaching, student learning, and preparation of teachers. In crisis settings, teacher professional development is often the aspect most overlooked (ibid). To address this gap, teacher trainers themselves should have both extensive field experience and specific qualifications (UNESCO IIEP, 2010). Teacher professional development (TPD) should be based on recognized standards and focus on competencies associated with quality teaching: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, assessment, communication, classroom management, and learning and development (Timperley, 2008). TPD should be long term (30-100 hours over 6

months) and move teachers through a cumulative process of change which focuses on how students learn (Katz & Dack, 2013; Levin, 2008). In order for teachers to adopt new classroom practices, they need to first gain knowledge of the innovation, see the potential benefits it has for their classroom, implement it regularly to evaluate whether it "works", and confirm its value through everyday use (Tobia, 2007). TPD is most effective when it takes place in the classrooms where teachers work (Haßler et al., 2011). Lastly, experienced teachers should be involved in building the capacity of their untrained peers through close mentorship (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2013; INEE, 2012). While there is ample literature on recommended TPD approaches in emergency contexts, including the incorporation of standards into TPD, there is a gap surrounding the presence and effect of employing standardized teacher competencies through empirical studies.

METHODOLOGY

This article reports on a study of the existing competencies of Burmese educators employed in MLCs in Tak Province, Thailand. The study compared baseline and endline evaluation scores of teachers who enrolled in a comprehensive 10-month in-service teacher training program which took place with two different cohorts over two consecutive academic years. At the onset of each academic year, a workshop was held where participants were introduced to the classroom observation tool[3] and the Burmese national TCSF, to which the observation tool is aligned (see Figure 1).

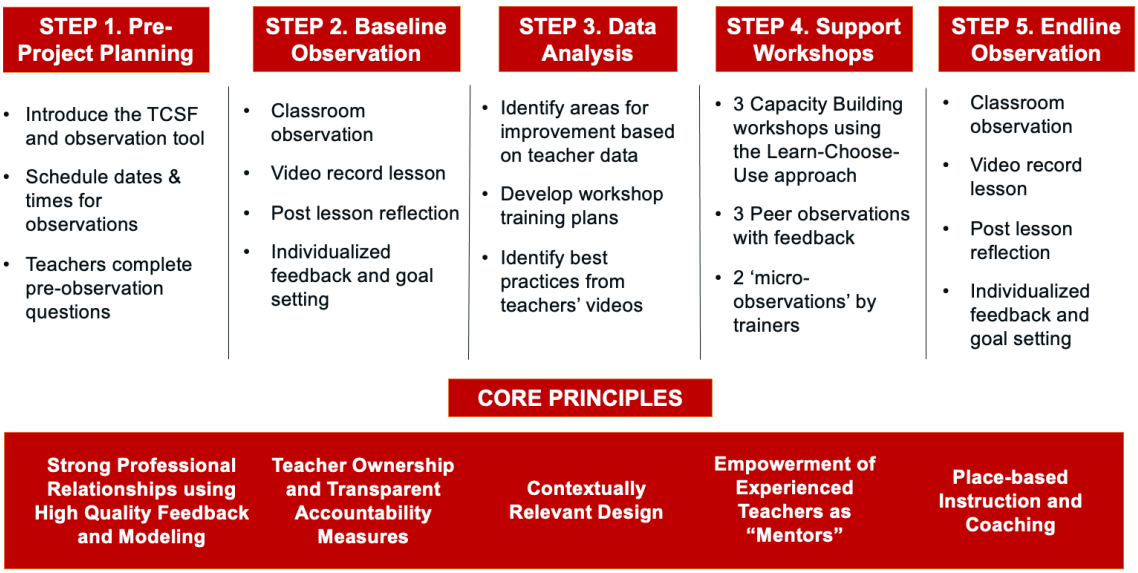

Figure 1: The TeacherFOCUS capacity building model

The capacity building program differentiated the experiences of teachers by providing them with options for improvement using TeacherFOCUS's *Learn-Choose-Use*

[3] The classroom observation tool is available for download at: https://www.teacherfocusmyanmar.org/observation-tools

Approach[4] (see Figure 2). During the workshops, trainers and experienced teachers modeled different methods to demonstrate each competency of the TCSF. Afterwards, participants could choose which methods worked best for them and their students. As much as possible, all workshops were conducted in the teachers' classrooms and used locally available resources and textbooks. This was done intentionally to emphasize the benefits of place-based instruction and coaching (Gawande, 2007).

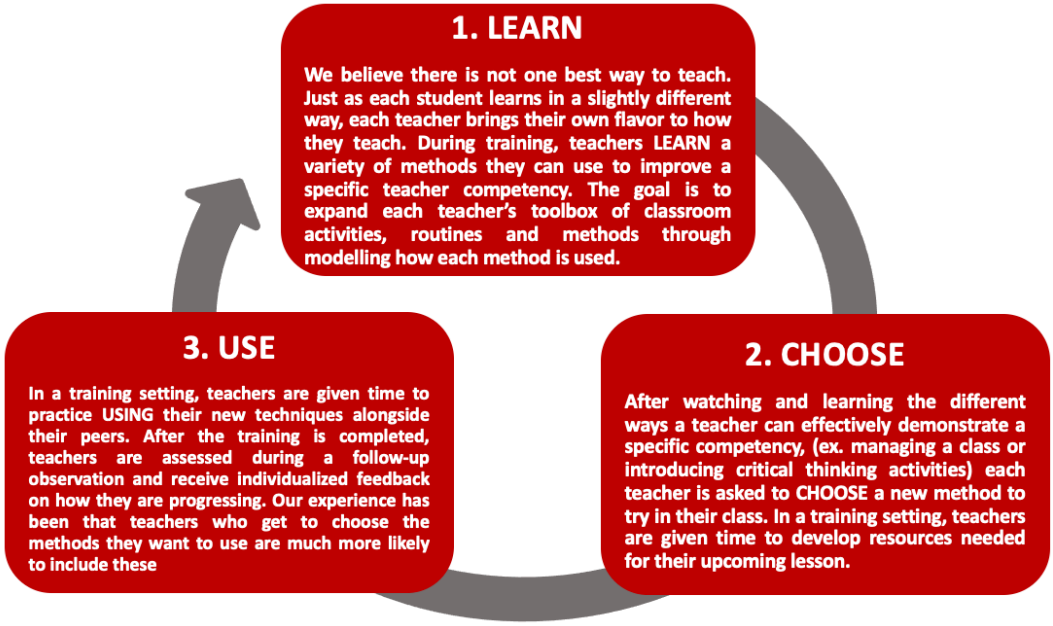

Figure 2. The Learn-Choose-Use Approach

The training and support were based upon the specific subject content each participant was expected to teach, resulting in tailored feedback particular to each participant's grade level and subjects taught. Workshops also promoted collaboration within teaching communities and across schools because teachers were able work with colleagues from similar disciplines and problem solve together. The entire capacity building program was founded on the philosophy that every teacher, no matter how experienced, has competencies they can improve on. Experienced teachers were given leadership roles during workshops, which acknowledged their existing proficiencies and empowered them to support other, less-experienced participants. This strategy aligned with recommended pedagogical approaches for adults whereby adults learn by teaching others (Draper, 2001).

Baseline observations were video recorded using a camera positioned at the back of each classroom. After each observation, teachers received individualized feedback in addition to their competency scores. Each teacher was shown highlights from their recorded lesson, allowing them to see the perspective of the students and reflect on their teaching. Once all observations were completed, baseline data was analyzed to identify priority areas for additional training. This training took the form of three one-day

[4] The Learn-Choose-Use manual is available for download at: https://www.teacherfocusmyanmar.org/learn-choose-use

workshops that teachers attended over the academic year. Workshop topics were determined by identifying the competencies that teachers collectively scored lowest on during baseline observations. Participants also learned how to conduct peer observations using a simplified peer observation form. After each workshop, teachers received a "micro-observation" by a trainer and were expected to conduct one peer observation with a colleague before the next workshop. At the end of the program, all participants received an endline observation using the same observation tool used during the baseline.

Sample and data collection

Voluntary participants comprised 132 teachers (33 males and 99 females) and was made up of primary, middle, and high school teachers who taught English, mathematics, Burmese, science, history, and/or geography. The teachers came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Karen, Kachin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan. All participants were employed full time and were not receiving other in-service professional development support. Teachers' backgrounds ranged from no previous teaching experience to over ten years in classrooms. In 2018-2019, 69 teachers from 15 MLCs participated in the study, and in 2019-2020, 63 teachers from 25 MLCs participated. It should be noted that additional teachers joined the program midyear, though their data was not included as part of this study. The trainers were all employed by TeacherFOCUS and were involved in designing the Learn-Choose-Use Approach and the observation tool. Trainers all possessed substantial teaching experience, knowledge of the tools and curricula, and familiarity with the context of MLCs.

Data analysis

Quantitative data from classroom observations and qualitative data from participants' pre- and post-observation responses were assessed using a rubric with four levels. Participants' overall competencies were calculated using the average of ten observed and eight knowledge-based competencies. Percentages were calculated based on the rubric scores attained for each competency (see Table 1). Teachers were considered to meet minimum competency standards if they achieved an average score of 50% or Level 3. Aggregated data was analyzed to develop recommendations for future professional development support planning.

Table 1. Rubric levels with corresponding percentages

	Rubric level	Score as %
Level 1 - Unsatisfactory (The teacher doesn't attempt)	1	0
Level 2 - Basic (The teacher attempts but is unsuccessful)	2-	20
	2	30
	2+	40
Level 3 - Competent (The teacher is successful)	3-	50
	3	60
	3+	70

Level 4 - Distinguished (Both the teacher and the students are successful)	4-	80
	4	90
	4+	100

FINDINGS

The most significant observed improvement as a result of the TPD was the level of collaboration among teachers as witnessed through cooperative lesson planning, the provision of constructive feedback and sharing best practices within structured workshop settings. As teachers experienced the power of collaborative learning during TPD activities, they were subsequently observed dedicating more time in their classes to ensure active student participation compared to previously observed traditional passive learning approaches. Consequently, students had both more opportunities and more options to demonstrate their learning of the subject content. During endline observations, teachers employed multiple group-based and individual activities, which increased student engagement and participation. When provided with options to demonstrate their teaching competencies via the Learn-Choose-Use Approach, teachers often went above expectations, utilizing multiple approaches in a single class. Statistical analysis of participants' pre- and post-test scores using Student's t test confirmed teachers improved as a result of the professional development program (see Table 2). Overall, teachers enrolled in the program improved an average of 15.34% across 18 competencies.

Table 2. Teachers' pre- and post-test scores

	Assess. method	**Mean pre-test (95% CI)**	**Mean post-test (95% CI)**	**Diff.***
DOMAIN A. PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	Qualitative	67.94 (65.24 – 70.64)	82.05 (79.84 – 84.25)	+14.12
A1. Know how students learn	Qualitative	66.29 (62.99 – 69.58)	83.64 (81.28 – 85.99)	+17.35
A2. Know available instructional technology	Qualitative	67.12 (64.02 – 70.22)	79.55 (76.75 – 82.34)	+12.42
A3. Know how to communicate well with students and their families	Qualitative	69.92 (66.58 – 73.72)	83.12 (80.38 – 85.84)	+13.18
A4. Know the curriculum	Qualitative	70.00 (66.96 – 73.04)	84.24 (81.76 – 86.72)	+14.24
A5. Know the subject content	Qualitative	66.49 (62.92 – 70.05)	79.62 (76.74 – 82.49)	+13.13
DOMAIN B. PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND PRACTICES	Quantitative	68.41 (65.69 – 71.13)	84.55 (82.75 – 86.34)	+16.14
B1. Subject concepts and content	Quantitative	70.00 (66.70 – 73.30)	83.49 (81.01 – 85.96)	+13.84
B2. Teaching and learning strategies	Quantitative	67.42 (64.14 – 70.71)	82.50 (80.05 – 84.95)	+15.08
B3. Lesson planning and delivery	Quantitative	65.53 (62.14 – 68.92)	80.90 (78.32 – 83.50)	+15.38
B4. Assess and monitor learning	Qualitative	64.01 (60.53 – 67.50)	81.74 (79.22 - 84.26)	+17.73

	Assess. method	Mean pre-test (95% CI)	Mean post-test (95% CI)	Diff.*
B5. Classroom environment and safety	Quantitative	74.62 (71.68 - 77.56)	88.94 (86.74 - 91.13)	+14.32
B6. Behaviour management	Quantitative	73.20 (70.06 - 76.35)	86.87 (84.56 - 89.18)	+13.67
B7. Work together with other teachers, parents, and community	Quantitative	64.24 (60.76 – 67.73)	87.50 (85.82 – 89.18)	+23.26
DOMAIN C. PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND DISPOSITIONS	Quantitative	67.38 (64.70 - 70.03)	81.91 (79.97 - 83.86)	+14.55
C1. Professionalism	Quantitative	74.55 (71.74 - 77.35)	88.71 (86.49 - 90.93)	+14.17
C2. Student's culture and heritage	Quantitative	60.83 (56.88 - 64.78)	75.53 (72.96 - 78.10)	+14.70
C3. Using resources	Quantitative	64.39 (60.96 - 67.83)	78.03 (75.29 - 80.77)	+13.64
C4. Fairness and C3.2 Inclusive teaching	Quantitative	69.70 (66.70 - 72.70)	85.38 (82.93 - 87.83)	+15.68
DOMAIN D. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT	Qualitative	68.07 (65.40 – 70.73)	85.26 (83.41 – 87.12)	+17.19
D1. Reflect on own teaching practice	Qualitative	70.00 (67.08 - 72.92)	84.77 (82.73 - 86.81)	+14.77
D2. Engage with colleagues in improving teaching practice	Qualitative	66.14 (63.14 – 69.13)	85.75 (83.81 – 87.69)	+19.61
OVERALL MEAN		68.01 (65.67 – 70.35)	83.35 (81.62 – 85.07)	+15.34

***** All t test p values were less than 0.001

Professional knowledge and the power of choice

Prior to receiving TPD, teachers were able to identify the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional learning needs of their students but struggled to identify methods they could employ to accommodate these needs accordingly. After TPD, teachers demonstrated a greater ability to differentiate their lessons to meet the diverse needs of their students. Additionally, after TPD teachers could describe ways in which they contextualized their learning activities depending on the age, language, ability, and culture of their students. Teachers still required support to adapt instruction for students struggling with content and students with special needs. TPD included trainers modeling student engagement methods, and afterwards teachers' lessons were more likely to include multiple learning experiences for student collaboration, inquiry, problem□solving, and creativity. After baseline observations, each teachers' goal needed to include trying at least one new teaching method in their next class. Afterwards, most teachers were observed using three or more new methods. This was attributed to teachers having ownership over their improvement and having a choice of which method(s) they used. After learning about visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning methods during TPD, teachers were more likely to employ multiple learning methods in a lesson. This was observed to increase student engagement and participation and provided additional opportunities for students to work together in small groups.

The TPD highlighted the importance of connecting lesson objectives to the social and cultural backgrounds of students and their communities, and, afterwards, teachers were more likely to be observed using localized examples. Furthermore, post-TPD learning objectives were more attainable and aligned to the subject curriculum and grade level taught. Overall, primary and middle school teachers demonstrated strong subject knowledge and were more confident in responding to student questions. Many secondary teachers struggled to explain advanced subject content, especially in mathematics and science. Secondary teachers shared accurate information with their students but were often unable to expand on or give examples of advanced concepts.

The contextualization of local culture and knowledge into teaching was challenging for all teachers, with observations confirming they strongly rely on the curriculum and missed opportunities to relate content to the students' daily lives. Teachers with less experience communicated that they may lack subject content knowledge and, therefore, feel less confident going beyond what was in the coursebook. Experienced teachers admitted they felt discomfort in moving away from traditionally held teaching practices, such as rote-learning.

Subject content knowledge in upper grades is an area which requires specific training and support in future interventions. Teachers effectively used available or created teaching or learning resources to enhance learning. Due to a lack of digital technology, teachers hand drew diagrams and pictures to explain complex concepts in subjects like science and geography, making the content more accessible and easier for students to understand.

Assessment and accountability

The largest area of growth following TPD was participants' ability to assess and monitor learning. The ability to incorporate assessment into a lesson was one of the lowest observed competencies during baseline observations. Teachers became more likely to intentionally integrate open-questions and skills-based assessment throughout the lesson whereas, prior to training, teachers predominantly used knowledge-based closed questions posed to the entire class. The hesitation to using open questions came from teachers not feeling confident in their subject knowledge in upper grades, and a reliance on rote methods in the lower grades. The number of closed questions asked by each teacher was tallied in the observation tool, which prompted teachers to use more open questions during the endline observations. Having contextually relevant accountability mechanisms, like the closed question tally, proved an effective way to foster improvement in areas teachers historically struggled with, namely, teachers asking for choral responses (Tyrosvoutis, 2016). Another reason for this change was teachers practicing asking open questions during workshops and discussing the benefits of "cold calling" students.

The quality of participants' feedback to students also greatly improved. During endline observations, feedback was more specific, individualized, and more often included examples of high-quality work or referenced success criteria. During endline observations, teachers more often used positive feedback and follow-up questions when correcting students. Previously, teachers were observed using corrective feedback, often stating the right answer rather than providing students additional opportunities to respond. Historically, corporal punishment and shaming have been used within

Burmese schools to manage student misbehavior. Following a workshop focusing on positive behaviour management methods, most teachers were observed consistently and appropriately using positive communication to correct undesirable behaviour. Encouragingly, teachers scored highest in behaviour management and classroom safety competencies during the endline observation. This was also attributed to experienced teachers being provided space to share how positive discipline methods change classroom culture—something less-experienced teachers might not have considered without concrete examples.

The importance of professional relationships and placed-based support

After endline classroom observations, teachers were better able to accurately reflect on successes in their lessons and self-identify areas they desired to develop professionally. A result of the TPD was that teachers were able to link their performance to specific competencies assessed during the observations. For example, teachers described active, intentional, supportive, and collaborative relationships with colleagues. As most teachers work in low-resource, multilingual classrooms, participants shared that they appreciated the place-based support, which allowed them to develop solutions in the contexts where they work. During endline post lesson interviews, teachers described the benefits of learning with and from other teachers from different schools during the workshops. A key feature of the TPD workshops was experienced teachers modeling best practices for new teachers. Most experienced teachers noted that the act of demonstrating their skills built their confidence and gave them an opportunity to help their peers. Teachers acknowledged that the transparent design of the project combined with the development of strong professional relationships with trainers helped them feel comfortable to share their ideas as well as uncertainties. Participants were all connected through a social media platform where best practice videos, made using their observation recordings, were shared. The platform worked to promote a positive and supportive community of practice where teachers' successes were celebrated. This also highlighted the importance of providing teachers with multiple opportunities to connect with other educators and build cross-school relationships

LIMITATIONS

Over 100 teachers were initially recruited during each year of this study. Due to factors outside of the researchers' control, teachers withdrew from the program and new teachers joined mid-year. The annual teacher attrition rate was approximately 40% within MLCs in Tak province (MECC, 2019). One of the main reasons teachers cited for leaving the profession was low pay. Migrant teachers receive a monthly stipend of approximately 3,000 THB (or $100 USD), which is about half of the minimum wage in Thailand.

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching is a demanding and multifaceted profession. This is especially true for those working in low-resource contexts, such as the MLCs included in this study. With so many students to manage, resources to prepare, and additional duties to complete, MLC teachers have little time for reflection or professional development. In this context, teachers often need to develop their own solutions to the challenging multilingual,

multi-grade, and low-resource classes they lead day after day. The research team intentionally celebrated participants' successes through positive reinforcement and praising teachers' best practices both individually and in front of their peers.

This study highlights the importance of gathering teachers from different schools to learn with and from each other. In line with recommendations from Ingvarson et al. (2005), the participatory workshops enabled the development and evaluation of teachers' own instruction improvement strategies and provided time for teachers to brainstorm and plan communally. As recommended by UNESCO (2020), participants explored new pedagogical approaches while becoming aware of their own conceptions of teaching and learning, thus collaboratively professionalizing.

Originally, the research team harboured concerns that the program might be too onerous for teachers, but the accountability system employed was readily adopted by participants. Teachers largely exceeded expectations by demonstrating multiple new methodologies when only required to perform one. The research team attributed this to the design of the program which gave teachers options of how they could demonstrate their competencies. As recommended by Hawley and Valli (1999), the program sought to build sustained capacity at the school level through differentiated place-based professional development. Differentiating professional learning opportunities to meet the unique needs of both new and experienced teachers and integrating adult learning modalities that build self-efficacy were integrated into the program as these approaches are almost universally recommended (Broad & Evans, 2006; Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2000).

The pitfalls of TPD are also well documented. Fullan et al. (2015) cite Mehta's (2013) *The allure of order* to describe the "Band-Aid" solution policy makers often select for education reform, "trying to do at the back end with external accountability what they should have done at the front end with capacity building" (p. 3). This could easily be applied to TPD in low-and middle-income countries, where short-term quick fixes or one-time teacher training programs are all too common (Fullan, 2011). TPD often asks teachers to use new methodologies they are only vaguely familiar with. This can cause pedagogical tissue rejection, to borrow a medical term, often resulting in little sustained impact, as witnessed in teachers on the Thai-Burma border (Tyrosvoutis, 2016). This program attempted to overcome this hurdle by allowing teachers to make their own decisions of how they wanted to improve by choosing which methods they would employ to achieve their goals. In their review of 26 TPD programs in low- and middle-income countries, Popova et al. (2016) found that professional development focused on subject content knowledge was crucial for improvement, compared with those that solely focused on pedagogic approaches, because many teachers lacked necessary subject knowledge. Subject content training is a remaining critical need for migrant teachers because the curriculum exponentially increases in difficulty during upper grades; providing few examples or sufficient explanation.

There is no singular panacea for teacher professional development in low-resource contexts, or, if there is, it is not achieved through a rigid model but in fact realized through contextualization, consultation, and the empowerment of teachers with choices for improvement. A foundational aspect of this program was using teacher competency data as both a framework for accountability and for improvement purposes to determine topics for professional development. In pursuit of being "data-driven" and "evidence-based", a potential pitfall is to lose sight of authentic improvement. Data used explicitly

for accountability or exhibition can be the low hanging fruit of interventions by development organizations working in low- and middle-income countries (Fullan, 2011). TPD interventions are frequently aligned to a wealth of projected outcomes and indicators, which most often results in energy being expended on collecting data and little on methods for improvements.

The teacher competency data collected as part of this study serves yet another purpose: to advocate for the recognition of migrant teachers. Even when demonstrating proficiency in the core competencies outlined in Burma's national TCSF, migrant teachers remain unrecognized by educational authorities. Prior to the coup d'état, work was being undertaken to use migrant teacher competency data to evidence teachers' proficiency and advocate for a flexible pathway they could be certified by the Ministry of Education. Further research and partnerships are needed to build bridges for teachers working in parallel education systems unable to attend traditional full-time university-based programs. Recognition is a yet unmet critical requirement for migrant teachers, which has the potential to enable greater security, professionalization, and further employment opportunities.

Funding and authors' positionality

This research was conducted by TeacherFOCUS as part of their migrant teacher capacity building program funded by Child's Dream Foundation Thailand. Annually, the project supports over 100 teachers and 3,000 migrant students living on the Thai-Burma border. The research was conducted from January 2018 to April 2020. TeacherFOCUS aims to promote a flexible pathway for the recognition of marginalized teachers from Burma working in parallel education systems. Through contextual capacity building, media-based solutions, educational research, and data-driven advocacy, TeacherFOCUS works to promote the accreditation of all educators; sanctity of the written word with honour for the spoken is a case in point.

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The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 20, No 3, 2021
http://iejcomparative.org

Access, ethical leadership and action in Solomon Islands education: A *tok stori*

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This article presents an investigation of a "grass roots" understanding of the relationship between ethical leadership in Solomon Islands and access, equity and quality in education. Access to education, a key element of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, is generally an aspirational matter framed by concrete factors such as new building programs, increased numbers of teachers, and so on. However, discussion about access can helpfully be extended by paying attention to ethical educational leadership because it supports students to attend school, especially when associated with the related concepts of equity and quality. This article re-thinks access through a tok stori *process in a Solomon Islands context. We propose a concept of access that employs a nuanced, strengths-based, widened lens to take account of ethical, creative and purposeful actions of school leaders. This enables education authorities to recognise and develop the "soft" leadership skills and ethical positions of leaders who have the potential to provide day-to-day enhancement of access through the ways they manage educational tensions.*

Keywords: Solomon Islands; leadership; education; tok stori; ethics; strengths-based

INTRODUCTION

The international education community emphasises the need to implement steps toward achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for All (EFA). The Solomon Islands' Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) seeks access, equity and quality education for all Solomon Islanders, regardless of gender, background, or ability (MEHRD, 2016). When access is discussed in Solomon Islands education, it has generally been in relation to increased finance, provision of buildings and growing the teaching force (Rodie, 2014) rather than as a function of leadership.

Globally, leadership has been understood in many ways: behaviour, influence over others, individual traits, interaction patterns, perception of others regarding legitimacy of influence, role relations and the occupation of an administrative position (Yukl, 1994). Solomon Islands leadership literature pays attention to several leadership models, including the Big Man (Rowland, 2016) or Big Woman, (Pollard, 2006); tribal Chief; and *Lida*, relevant in civil society and formal sector organisations. Positional

school leadership in Solomon Islands takes place in local Solomon Island settings, but is generally understood by reference to leadership models from other domains (Ruqebatu, 2008). To be successful, however, school leadership must resonate with locally framed ethics.

Leadership programs have been developed that have influenced the quality of education in Solomon Islands (Sanga, Maebuta et al., 2020; Sanga, Reynolds et al., 2020). However, little general attention has been given to the potential to produce positive change of local relational leadership as practiced by leaders with institutional positions in the educational work force. Equally, little work has examined how school leaders adopt ethical stances to support current generations of children to experience enhanced access to quality education.

The core of this article is an investigation of a "grass roots" understanding of the relationship between ethical leadership in Solomon Islands and access, equity and quality in education. This focus is not intended to distract attention from wider developments nor absolve policymakers and funders of responsibility for improving educational access or for reviewing equity and quality as essential aspects of education. Instead, we aim to extend the frame of responsibility by reviewing how ethical, leaderful actions can enhance access to equitable and high-quality educational provision.

We point to the ethics of taking action to facilitate access through two vignettes at school level. In our account, the leaders' actions reflect everyday situations in Solomon Islands education. The argument values "soft" leadership skills and ethical leadership positions in pursuit of access as adjuncts to ministry and provincial level "hard" initiatives and donor-funded projects. Widening the field of responsibility in this way raises the stakes for policymakers to invest in the development of ethical school leaders.

The article begins by offering a sketch of context through a discussion of education that references international and Solomon Islands policy. We then provide a brief review of leadership in Melanesian education. Next, our methodology is presented through the literature of *tok stori*. Following this, we develop two vignettes through *tok stori* to form the data, which we discuss to reveal an extended frame for viewing access to quality education and other significances of ethical leadership. Finally, we present implications of potential value in other contexts.

ACCESS, EQUITY AND QUALITY IN EDUCATION

Solomon Island education

Following independence in 1978, the Solomon Islands government fully administered what had been a colonial education system (Rodie, 2014) with the aim of building a focused, rounded and well-grounded education system to prepare Solomon Islanders to meet the myriad of development challenges and changes that Solomon Islands faced into the future (MEHRD, 2016).

Authority for Solomon Islands education is not wholly centralised. Provincial and church Education Authorities (EAs) and some communities assume partial responsibility (Rodie, 2014). Johannson-Fua et al. (2018) noted that community involvement in the systematic rethinking of educational development is very important. This article takes devolution further by examining the potential for improved access,

equity and quality as a consequence of ethical leadership in response to needs and circumstances at a local level.

An element in the framing of education in Solomon Islands is the UNESCO policy of universal basic education for all as a right (UNESCO, 2002). As part of its response to SDG 4, MEHRD developed the National Education Action Plan (NEAP) for 2016–2030. NEAP emphasised access and, in keeping with SDG 4, a central aim of NEAP is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (MEHRD, 2016, p. 3). This is in a context where the gross enrolment rate at school years 10–13 was 35% in 2016 (MEHRD, 2017).

Research suggests that equitable access and success in education depend on the quality of school leaders as well as on the effective implementation of national education policies and practices (Nthebe et al., 2016). Within NEAP, leadership is a key support for the achievement of SDGs (MEHRD, 2016). However, there is a dearth of literature to describe the relationship between the ethics and actions of leaders and learners' access to education at the grass-roots level.

Leadership in Solomon Islands education

Effective educational leadership can be measured in diverse ways (Daniëls et al., 2019). Within Solomon Islands education, one way of judging the effectiveness of leadership is the degree to which education policies and practices lead to visible, valued outcomes. In Solomon Islands education, valued outcomes include equal access to school (MEHRD, 2008b; 2016); the provision of quality assessment tasks (Rodie, 2014); evidence of quality teaching and learning resources; success of staff in higher training and qualification (Iromea, 2020; MEHRD, 2015); leaders actively assuring the availability of funds (DFAT, 2017; MEHRD, 2008a); and the higher academic achievement of students (MEHRD, 2012).

MEHRD (2016) holds that access is the backbone of the Solomon Island government's approach to sustainable education development, and, certainly, the outcomes valued in Solomon Islands are largely irrelevant for children who cannot attend school. Significantly, the vignettes presented below suggest that some aspects of access-based policies remain only partially implemented. Shortcomings imply that the relationships between systemic educational provision and effective educational leadership in Solomon Islands requires further development.

In global literature, there are accounts of the links between leadership and educational quality. Pak (2015) suggested that an effective education system reflects teachers and principals with positive attitudes toward teaching and learning; schools with good character have quality teachers and leaders who develop and equip students with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that promote future learning. McLaughlin (1995) drew attention to schools as learning environments in which the full potential of a student should be recognised by school leaders. In this view, schools are organisations set apart by community leaders to educate younger generations for future eventualities. Consequently, there is a relationship between community sustainability in Solomon Islands, effective school environments and educational leadership.

One element of leadership is creatively managing tensions, such as between long-standing Solomon Island views of school effectiveness as being closely associated with

academic assessments and results (Rodie, 2014) and the multiple aims involved in effectively educating Solomon Islands' citizens (MEHRD, 2016) to become useful to community and social sustainability. For instance, a school may want to develop practical village-useful "industry" but finds opposition from parents who overwhelmingly value examination results as a route to paid employment (F. H. Kwaina, personal communication, July, 2016).

The management of tensions is a complex task that requires effective leaders who have a positive mindset towards students' integral development (Australian Academy of Science, 2011). Creative school leaders are those who can support the realisation of MEHRD's (2016) approach to the holistic development of school students though the enhancement of academic, social, physical and spiritual growth. However, there is little evidence in the literature of creativity as an aspect of leadership training for educators in Solomon Islands.

A second tension faced by Solomon Islands education leaders is the need for pragmatic navigation between aspirational policy and day-to-day actuality. Even though enhanced access is a system aspiration, Rodie (2014) found that students' access to formal education remains constrained by lack of space and low financial resources to build facilities equipped for teaching and learning. In this situation, without alternative drivers of change, patterns of inequity and poor-quality education are likely to persist. Leaders have a choice: to wait for MEHRD, donors or other bodies to enhance access to quality education in their area of influence, or to act themselves within their everyday constraints to improve access. Choices of this nature are ethical as much as practical.

METHODOLOGY

Tok stori is a Melanesian placed-based dialogic understanding of the world (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019). Some researchers point to correspondences between *tok stori* and *talanoa* in certain situations (Sanga et al., 2018; Talanoa & Development Project, 2005), while in other contexts, clear differences may be observed (Sanga et al., 2018). As engagement, *tok stori* involves dialogue through which people share space and talk about their experiences, clarifying ideas without judgement.

Located in a relational ontology, *tok stori* fosters respectful relationships. *Tok stori* involves "reciprocal learning, capitalizing on the experiences of others in similar contexts" (Sanga, Maebuta, et al., 2020, p. 24). Trust is built among those involved because, as a relational activity, *tok stori* creates a safe space for deep conversation (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019). *Tok stori* encourages deep engagement since the process involves storying experiences.

Tok stori is not only about chronological or narrative storytelling. It is also about sharing the intimacy of what people know but keeping shared secrets sacred in a way that opens them to intellectual scrutiny. A central idea in developing *tok stori* through digital means is that *tok stori* is more than simple narration; storied data develops through the iterative *tok stori* process, and this can be across video sessions and over time.

Away from authorship, we (John and Martyn) have developed a friendship over time through face-to-face contact in Wellington and Honiara. We are educators with experience in secondary education and interest in the role of leadership in school improvement, particularly in terms of equity. John is from Malaita, Solomon Islands.

He is on a break from school leadership while he completes his PhD in that area. Martyn is an Anglo-Welsh migrant to Aotearoa New Zealand. His school-based leadership career is over; he now provides research, evaluation and professional development support in Aotearoa and across the region. This paper grew through a *tok stori* methodology (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020b) shaped by distance and mediated by technology.

The setting of the stories that form the data in the article is the Solomon Islands, and the experiences are John's, first or second hand. He presented them to Martyn via a video conferencing platform because of the distance between Sydney and Wellington, our respective bases. In addition, the COVID 19 situation curtailed expected opportunities to meet face-to-face. Mindful of the cultural framing that can be applied to video conferencing (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020a), we decided to take a "digital practice turn" (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020a) and continue to push the boundaries of *tok stori*. This is because, for us*, tok stori* is about caring and changing lives. Thus, the main aims of our engagement were to deepen our friendship and to experience the enjoyment of this as well as to explore and continually re-create a new world of understanding through narrative exchange. Authorship is a clear second. Because of our contexts, at times the digital link was in real time and included video, which helped to transform virtual space into *tok stori* relational space (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020a). At others, emails substituted asynchronous storying.

We argue that several elements make this methodology *tok stori*. These are more to do with how we understood the process ontologically and less about the form or method of what we did. The whole engagement was built on friendship and mutual respect. Although face-to-face contact originally facilitated the development of a warm relationship, distance and digital mediation did nothing to cool it. In other words, if we claim each other as *wantok*, a common Solomons Pijin term that is a "unifying symbol that reflects the identity of people" (Fito'o, 2019, p. 55) location is of little significance; we tend to use the words, *Hi wantok*, as a form of greeting to frame our engagement in a relational way.

Contextualising *tok stori* through being *wantoks* seeks to signal and then reinforce an open or free space. The *tok stori* space becomes available for us to share and to interact relationally and unconditionally. The qualities of the space are important to us because to carry out in-depth inquiry by storytelling in a peaceful unifying atmosphere, there is a need for balance, unity and safety. Finding a balance in *tok stori* (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019), rendered in English as "oneness" and indicated by "*wantok*" in Solomons Pijin, means we "*tok* as *wan*", converse as one people, with common interest and a desire to be close, regardless of background. Thus, through *tok stori,* a mutually beneficial partnership developed between Martyn's ignorance-based inquisitiveness and John's experience-based introspection as the narrative data became wedded to explanatory data.

In *tok stori*, information is exchanged in reciprocal ways, and can be modified as a result of interaction (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019; Sanga et al., 2018). Martyn wanted to understand layers beneath the surface of the events described in John's stories. This is attention to the "why" and "how" below the "what". A rhythm developed of a story being told, interrogated, selectively retold and re-interrogated as speaking and listening roles passed back and forth over time in the safe space of friendship (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019). The effect on Martyn was that he was able to glimpse more deeply

into the Solomon Islands context. For John, the result was the vocalisation of what had been submerged understandings. Surfacing these understandings allowed him to investigate, refine and connect incidents and motivations originally separated in time. The end result was a series of vignettes, two of which are presented here.

TOK STORI DATA

In this section we present two vignettes developed through *tok stori*. Each vignette is divided into an initial section that deals with access and ethics, and a subsequent section focused on leadership action. The material, which refers to John's first and second-hand experiences, has been subject to redaction for ethical reasons.

The discussion acknowledges the challenges faced by education systems to achieve aspirational goals and seeks to avoid placing blame for any shortcomings. Instead, by reframing the concept of access beyond centrally controlled "hard" features, we aim to illustrate the importance of ethical leadership at the school level. As a result, we draw attention to the value of deliberate attempts to develop "soft" skills of grassroots ethical educational leadership.

Vignette one: Shift system

Vignette one depicts the way ethical leadership identifies the potential of existing resources to help meet the aspirational goal of government, parents and students to increase access to education. It begins with a description of the situation in a high school during a recent school year.

> Students were overcrowded, with three or four students per desk, whilst some of the students without tables and chairs had to sit on the floor. Others stood for the whole 40-80 minutes period inside the classroom and outside, listening and writing down notes. There was a dilemma to enrol more students to meet the government policy of "access" and there was this question of adequate and quality teaching and learning . . . I see the need for education, and I could see how struggling and desperate parents are in search of education for their children. I felt obliged and responsible to wipe away their visible and invisible tears. There are school policies for selecting transfer students and the government allows one teacher to 35 students in class. I had to bend the rules, not break the rules. I took control of the selection of transfer students. I told all the teaching staff and the principal that we are going to take all the students who want to transfer into our school. It is not their problem. It was our problem to find ways for students to have access to learning because that is their right. They must learn regardless of their background or academic performance. So, I accepted all the students who came to seek for space in my school.

This section illustrates a common tension (Pak, 2015) between the laudable national goal of increased access to education and realities on the ground. The school leaders were aware of the centrally devised policies of enrolment, class sizes and funding formulae while negotiating with realities of resources. However, in the Solomon Islands policy setting, given the level of monitoring by central authorities, actors are able to implement policy creatively and adaptively.

The leader's reading of the situation is in line with the ethical stance promoted by the MEHRD (2011): to act with "integrity, honesty, equality and impartiality" (p. 37). Honesty involves admitting there is an issue to be solved; integrity means accepting that

lack of access is experienced by students but must be owned by those with power to change the situation; equality involves accepting that the right to education is equal, regardless of origin or prior performance; and impartiality means welcoming all who wish to learn. The ethical stance of the leader in the vignette is to take responsibility. This decision is grounded in empathy for students and parents, mindful of the emotions attached to the struggle for education, and cognizant of the potentially life-changing value of education. However, leaderful decisions in Solomon Islands education take place in a context where ethical dilemmas are frequently encountered. These might include the way the *wantok* system, a system of interpersonal connection and obligation (Fito'o, 2019), can affect decisions; nepotism (Nanau, 2011); and bribery (Vasethe, 2020).

The decision to assume responsibility for access meant accepting all students who wanted to enrol through transfer. Consequently, devising a practical way to meet the goal of enhanced access to education became the next step. This action, not unique to this context, is described in the next section of the vignette.

> We had two kinds of school programs. The mainstream normally runs from 8 am to 2 pm. The Shift Program runs from 2 pm to 6 pm. I decided to come up with this Shift Program due to the high demand from the public to provide opportunity for their children who really want to continue with secondary education. Teachers were fully informed, and their claims were met according to agreement and expectations. Most of the teachers were our school's teachers and some were outsourced. The program ran well for two years, though there were challenges in terms of lack of central support-finance, and recruitment of full-time staff for shift classes. The Shift Program actually helped a lot of parents who wanted their children to go on to Form 6 or Year 12 to at least get an opportunity to go to tertiary institutions. It assisted a lot of students by offering them second chance into formal education and some ended up in colleges or universities . . . These two programs were successfully completed despite challenges faced. I found this initiative very helpful for Solomon Islands, and it may be for other Pacific Island nations.

This solution is an example of creative leadership ethically managing the tension between aspiration and reality. Creativity can be seen in the way leadership identifies time as a "soft" resource that can be re-thought so that the "hard" matters such as desks and rooms can be shared equitably.

The actions of the leader address the issue of quality education in at least three ways. First, class sizes are reduced by increasing the number of teaching sessions. This has the potential to scaffold more teacher-student interaction. Second, proximity between teacher and students is improved if students are in smaller groups. This allows teachers to have a helpful closer view of how students are learning. Third, keen students are rewarded by inclusion; they are offered an opportunity to belong, regardless of their educational history and length of association with the school.

Vignette two: Graduation

Vignette two depicts another way ethical leadership skilfully identifies time as a "soft" resource that can be reframed to ensure continued access to education in circumstances where a lack of finance might close access. This recollection is of an experience told second hand.

> It was in October, when X was a deputy principal. Unexpectedly, there were some parents from [a distant] Province who came to the school and asked to see him. These were the parents of the Year 12 students who were about to attend their graduation before sitting for their final examination. The deputy asked them to tell him about their problem or issue. And they started to tell about their children's school fees. They shared their stories about their [sponsor]. These poor parents had waited for so long . . . Unfortunately, the payment was delayed and so the parents were worried about their children, thinking that the school would send their children home for failing to pay their school fees and that would affect them so much. The worst scenario would be that if students didn't pay their school fees, the school would send students home . . . to put pressure on fee payers to quickly pay their outstanding fees.
>
> After having some discussion, the parents begged the deputy to allow their children to attend their classes and also to take part in the graduation. He thought deeply about the parents' concern and need for their children to continue with education and to attend their graduation. That was a crucial moment for him—to find ways to assist the parents; instead of punishing their children for non-payment of school fees, he thought that he must try to do something to help them.

This section of the vignette provides an illustration of another common tension: the school relies on fees to provide education to students, but these students have not paid theirs. Future difficulties are likely if a precedent is set of educating non-paying students. Complicating factors exist in this vignette in that the families have a distant home base and consequently less immediate access to resources than local families. Promises have been made but broken regarding fees payment, leaving the families in limbo awaiting the action of others.

The ethical stance of the leader is to accept the problem rather than assign it to the family. The deputy leads with integrity towards both leaners and institution; he not only knows that the students need access to education but also that the school needs money. Consequently, he knows he must actively find a solution and not turn a blind eye. The creativity of the action taken is revealed in the next section of the vignette.

> The deputy told the parents that he would see the principal and he talked to him about the delay in the payment of their children's school fees. The principal advised the deputy to issue letters to students who did not pay their school fees and send them home. In fact, the deputy was not in the mood for sending students home for non-payment of school fees. He was worrying about the concern of the parents and these nine Year 12 students who were in their final year, and they were getting ready for their graduation and final exams.
>
> He told them that he would try his best to help them. He could see from the students that they were not settling down and they were worried about their education. So, he took the names of the students and told them to go back to their classes.
>
> Later, the deputy asked principal if he could allow him to deal with the students and, if possible, allow the students to continue to attend their classes and prepare for their graduation. The principal had some doubts, and he recalled a good number of students who never paid their school fees. However, he allowed his second in command to take the responsibility and told him to go and see the graduation committee chairlady to deal with the group of students.
>
> The chairlady told the deputy that her graduation committee would not allow students who failed to pay their school fees to attend the graduation. A thought

> quickly came into the deputy's mind that actually worked out for them on that day. He thought that he should tell the chairlady about an arrangement that he made with the [sponsor] to see him soon to talk about the payment. . . . In fact, he had not made any arrangement yet, but he was creating a positive story for the chairlady to consider the request.
>
> So that was the time the chairlady accepted the request, and the deputy submitted the names of those nine students to her committee for graduation. Finally, the students were graduated. They were presented with graduation folders that contained letters (not real graduation certificates) saying that they would collect their graduation certificate later after completion of school fees. The parents were happy, and they came to say thank you. After the graduation, arrangement was made with the [sponsor] and payment of the students' school fees were finally settled.

This section of the vignette shows that, like the deputy, the principal is aware of the key dilemma—balancing the need for fees against the desire for education. The principal tolerated the actions of the deputy, who had patience with the sponsor. The revised situation, which anecdotal evidence suggests is frequently employed at the tertiary level in Solomon Islands, provides more time in which to create a resolution.

The ethics of embroidering reality for the graduation committee chairwoman are questionable. In the distortion offered by the deputy principal, an imagined plan is described as if achieved so that the ethic of honesty is in question. This points to the contextual complexity of ethics. In any situation there are multiple layers, each with its own attendant ethical reference. Should 100% honesty in the relationship between the leader and the staff member be given priority over access, the focus of the relationship between the leaders, students and parents? Perhaps in balancing the layers of ethics, the leader's actions can be appreciated in reference to the outcome: the "soft" resource of time is expanded to allow the students continued access to education while the immediate dignity of the chairwoman and her committee is respected. Distortion may not be ethical but following the letter of the school's policy would remove access to education and erode equity.

A further aspect of ethics in this vignette is that risk was born by the deputy, not the students and parents involved. One can only speculate what would have happened had the fees not been paid. What is clear is that the uncertainty was eroding the quality of educational experience of the students and that this was defused by the deputy accepting responsibility. Their support of continued access to education had long-term positive consequences.

> Last year, 2019, we met one of the students who went further to do his nursing program at the Solomon Island National University. He is now currently working as a nurse at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara. There were others who went further to continue with formal training at the USP centre in Honiara and some of them are now working for the government and private sectors.

Long-term consequences like these illustrate the potential of ethical leadership to take actions that support access to quality education. Ethical leadership involves those with power accepting responsibility to act in support of goals such as SDG 4. Students' subsequent contributions to the nation show the value of leaders' creativity, decision making and actions.

DISCUSSION

The two vignettes offered above provide "grassroots" scenarios through which to review the concept of access. In the first, student access to education is supported by the creative use of time so that a Shift System enlarges provision. In the second, by disassociating the time of fees payment from the time for ongoing study and graduation, the spirit of SDG 4 was prioritised over the letter of school policy. Put together, the vignettes suggest that improved access to quality education is more than a matter of increasing the numbers of teachers and buildings or providing additional funding. Access can also be a matter of the decisions and actions of ethical leaders responding to everyday situations.

Leadership that embraces the ethics of "integrity, honesty, equality and impartiality" (MEHRD, 2011, p. 37) can support access through creative approaches such as in the vignettes. Given the significance of ethical leadership in schools and its outcomes, a balance between leadership and systemic aspects of education has great potential to support goals such as SDG 4. Consequently, a premium should be placed on training that supports school leaders to employ their lived schema of leadership (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019) in which the tears and petitions of students and parents are powerful motivations towards ethical behaviour and action.

The vignettes also show the educational potential of decision making at a local level and suggest that it is helpful for EFA to be understood beyond the entry point into education to include security of educational continuity. Long-term educational stability of access is implied in NEAP's intention to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (MEHRD, 2016, p. 3). However, as the vignettes illustrate, there is often a tension between local decision making and top-down policy construction. Localisation of decision making may bring locally experienced benefits at the political cost to central bodies of a shift in power in developing and other countries (Packalen, 2007). Despite the potential advantages of local decision making, tension can be felt by school leaders charged with implementing policy while managing their schools in a relationally rich environment.

Central bodies clearly have a role in decision making at a national level. However, over-retention of decision-making power may be an expression of low confidence in local decision making. One way to encourage central confidence in decentralisation is the provision of training to support school leaders to make appropriate ethical decisions. This kind of training has the potential to support school leaders to appreciate the power of empathy-driven ethical decisions. The vignettes show how such decisions can contribute to access at the local level and thus be significant in the lifelong learning of individuals.

Solomon Islands is not unique in posing ethical dilemmas to the school leader, although different ethical challenges may exist in other contexts. Further ethical issues in Solomon Islands education include the use of funds, undue influence on school practices by individuals such as elected representatives, effects of certain applications of the *wantok* system, and managing staff absenteeism. Thus, deliberate efforts to develop the ethical decision-making capacity of school leaders is of great significance in and beyond Solomon Islands.

The core of this article has been an investigation of leaders' understandings of the relationship between ethical leadership in Solomon Islands and access, equity and

quality in education. The contribution of this article is to argue the case for valuing the "soft" skills and ethical leadership positions of leadership that are associated with maximising equitable access to quality education as an adjunct to ministry and provincial level "hard" initiatives and donor funded projects as well as to contribute in other ways. Re-contextualising key concepts in educational policy and planning (Sanga, Maebuta, et al., 2020) such as access, equity and quality enable a wide, nuanced and actionable approach to be taken so that value is placed on the creative skills and ethical positions of leaders on the ground—they are the ones who can make a difference.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This article has presented two "grass-roots" vignettes of ethical action by school leaders as the basis for a discussion of how access can be re-viewed so that the significance of soft skills and ethical stances complement the more general focus on "hard" materials such as buildings, finance and staffing. We have linked ethical action to taking responsibility, not so that policy makers and donors are absolved of responsibility, but as a way of recognising and honouring creative everyday practices at the local level. In this way, some of the dots can be joined between high-level educational policy and local level practice, perhaps supporting more coherent discussion across the layers of organisation in Solomon Islands education. The need to connect policy and practice is especially pertinent in situations where aspects of policy are funded on donor aid framed by worldviews and educational frameworks derived from afar. In these circumstances, deep contextualisation is required (Sanga, Maebuta, et al., 2020).

The use of *tok stori* by school leaders to find solutions to local issues is an element of contextualisation with great potential (Sanga, Reynolds, et al., 2020). As this article has illustrated, *tok stori* has potential in Melanesian contexts to reveal facets such as ethical action, creativity and significant tensions in the everyday lives of school leaders. It has been used in leadership development programmes (Sanga, Reynolds, et al., 2020). John has experience of its educative power at the staff-room level, where local responses have been developed to school security by involving senior students and staff in decision making. Continuing education during Covid 19 school shutdowns is another context where *tok stori* among local stakeholders might provide bespoke solutions in the face of centrally made decisions.

Issues can be created where contextualisation is lacking. An example is the conflict between central school enrolment policies that dictate ratios of students to classrooms and numbers of students on the ground whose parents are seeking enrolment. In this case, pressure from the parents and community encourages school leaders to enrol their children, a situation affected by the strong cultural relationships people have in the Solomon Islands. In local settings, what matters more than set ratios is responding to the needs of the parents and the community as indicated by their tears and petitions.

Some of the thinking and practice described in this article has value beyond the immediate context of Solomon Islands. As an example, during a recent educational engagement with Marshall Islands school leaders, Martyn heard of an arrangement similar to the Shift System described in Vignette One as a school leader's response to over-crowding. What is significant is that this outcome did not arise because of pressure from centralised administration but was the result of ethically focused leadership. Taking a wide approach to what access means and adopting creative actions to enhance

the educational experiences students involves both creative skills and an ethical stance to steer creativity. Taking steps to deliberately develop ethical school leaders has potential to provide another arrow in the bow of educational administrators as they seek to fulfil the aspirations of SDG 4 and to provide support for school leaders in navigating ethics in their everyday leadership.

Acknowledgements

John and Martyn acknowledge the inputs of the anonymous reviews, guidance of Associate Professor Kabini Sanga, the contributions of storytellers, and the patience and love of our families.

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The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 20, No 3, 2021
http://iejcomparative.org

Fiji at the crossroad: Is the Indigenous community ready for school, family, community partnerships

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This paper examines contradictions between Epstein's 2010 US-based model promoting a learner-centred approach to education and a view that schools should uphold iTaukei (Indigenous Fijian) traditions. Epstein's school, family, community partnerships model is discussed with a focus on why it conflicts with the iTaukei traditional setting in rural villages. Exacerbating this conflict is the chiefly title dispute in Tawase village. Over almost 50 years, this dispute has fragmented the community and its satellite villages, weakening support for the local primary school and children's learning and eroding the social capital of the villages.

Keywords: school-family-community-partnership; chiefly dispute; community cohesion; learner-centred education; bottom-up traditional curriculum

INTRODUCTION

The proselytising of Christian beliefs by missionaries in the 1800s brought profound changes to Indigenous Fijians, introducing a new religion with Western[1] forms of education and consequent transformation in Fijian culture. Teaching "Christian" converts literacy and numeracy with those "wonderful books" that had "strange marks" inside them by which people could "talk" to others living far away were mesmerising to many *iTaukei* (Indigenous Fijian) (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 25). The adoption of Christianity did not, of course, completely transform the Indigenous Fijian culture. It created a strong overlap between the new belief and Indigenous tradition, indigenising many aspects of the Christian faith. Some customary practices were deplored by missionaries and condemned, for example the practice of *Veiqia*,[2] other practices were encouraged as supporting the new religion. The appointment of chiefs or their relatives to important positions in the church reinforced the overlap, what Tavola (1991) calls "grafting".

Grafting also occurred in the education system where traditional socialisation permeated the classroom culture. However, although traditional socialisation is still evident in the school system, there are also practices that conflict with tradition. Children are taught to stand up when a visitor enters a room, yet in traditional situations they are taught to

[1] The concept "Western" refers to practices, culture or ideas and behaviour of Western countries such as those of Europe and Northern America, which have been adopted in many other countries.
[2] *Veiqia* practice involves women tattooing young girls to symbolise resilience, maturity, responsibility as a person coming of age.

remain seated to show respect. Children are encouraged to question and be inquisitive, an attitude that is an anathema to Indigenous custom. (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 36).

The colonial education system

The development of Fiji's racially divided school system was partly due to the colonial policy of protectionism for the Indigenous Fijians and partly a consequence of community commitment and effort to educate their children (Coxon, 2000). Indigenous Fijian community schools were opened with the help of missionaries who taught *iTaukei* (Indigenous Fijians) literacy and numeracy ahead of Indo-Fijians who were largely ignored by the colonial government. By 1916, the Grant-in-aid schools project had contributed to the rise in the number of Indo-Fijian schools and their demand for an academic curriculum. It also entrenched the dual system of state-community partnerships where voluntary schools were for the majority of the population, and government schooling was for a select few. The 1969 Education Commission found that rural schools were often resource-poor compared to urban schools and the gaps created by the dual system adversely affected the quality of education. The commission recommended a relevant curriculum, appropriate pedagogical training of teachers, and the phasing out of state-community partnership schools. However, the dual system of voluntary and state continue to create inequities, especially in rural areas.

The colonial government introduced other measures that also have ongoing ramifications for the governance of Indigenous Fijians. A major change was the establishment of a separate arm of government, the Fijian Administration, with jurisdiction over the affairs of Indigenous Fijians in accordance with a special set of laws to enforce the racial divide and the protectionist colonial policy. Under the Fijian Administration, now called the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs (MTA), was the iTaukei Land and Fisheries Commission (TLFC), tasked to record details of local land ownership. In order to establish land boundaries, the TLFC had to first identify the paramount chief of each social unit. The TLFC based its decisions on sworn oaths made during enquiries conducted in the colonial period. The record is called *Tukutuku Raraba* (TR) which has become the basis of decision-making whenever there is a chiefly dispute. However, the record itself is a cause of bitter contestation among candidates vying for chiefly positions, such as occurs in the Tawase community, of which I am a member. In that case, a chiefly title dispute is at the root of community divisions, which spills over into the administration of the school.

The chiefly dispute is not the only problem for the Tawase school. There is a disjunct between the ideal role the school should have in the community from Western-influenced perspectives and what a rural Fijian community expects from the school. In 2007, a national curriculum was developed which aimed to incorporate the UN 2000 sustainable goals (2000) and local values and practices. It had a global outlook yet was grounded in "real life" experience. Under the 2007 curriculum, students were expected to equip themselves with skills and knowledge that would enable them to be innovative and enterprising, solve problems, think critically, and develop lifelong abilities (Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts, 2007, p. 4). This curriculum was replaced by the current government in 2016. The then MoE minister, Dr. Reddy, in a speech at an agricultural college, asserted that Fiji needed independent thinkers so that graduates can reinvest in the community by engaging in commercial enterprises rather than maintaining subsistence farming (Krishna, 2016; *The Fiji Times*, 2016). Though an apparently progressive and ambitious statement, the reality is that the MoE is not

listening to what the community wants (Narsey, January 2014, November 2014, 2021; Prasad, 2021).[3] Nor does it address the many schisms in the education system, such as the need to train teachers to be inclusive and flexible to students' needs and better infrastructure. Especially, the 2016 curriculum has reverted to rote, teacher-focused and exam-oriented learning, with an emphasis on standardised testing (Crossley et al., 2017).

One of the much-needed changes highlighted by the Report of the Fiji Islands Commission (2000) concerned agency in students to develop "an awareness of how their actions can individually and collectively contribute to the development of their local communities and the nation as a whole" (Bacchus, 2000, p. 56). This need has not been addressed by the MoE which accentuates the contradiction between the school and the community's expectation that its traditional culture should be taught in schools as well as knowledge and skills for modern life. Of the aims declared in the 2007 curriculum only the fostering of lifelong skills remains in the 2016 curriculum (Chand, 2016, p. 1). However, lifelong skills in the 2016 reform can be interpreted as having a technical and skills-driven agenda rather than an objective of encouraging creative thinking.

The disjuncture above is deepened by the 2016 reform and its Pillar 4 on "*Parental Engagement: Framework and Strategies"*, a guideline meant to strengthen school, family, community partnerships and "child-centred" learning. Included in this framework are a list of questions that each party can ask of the other (e.g., parents to head teachers), aimed at ensuring accountability in service provision and parental responsibility in enhancing children's learning. The "shift to a more 'child-centred' learning" (MoE, 2016, p.2) conflicts with the traditional method of learning which is group-oriented, involving "observing, emulating and participating through family and community life" (Scaglion, 2015, p. 285). According to Bremner (2021), child/learner-centred education (LCE) needs to be flexible to accommodate individual differences, contextually appropriate, and based on six aspects: active participation, relevant skills, adapting to needs, power sharing, autonomy, and formative assessments (p. 181).

The failure of LCE trials in many countries identified as "developing" suggests that alternative pedagogies should be considered for learners from traditional backgrounds (Schweisfurth, 2011). In promoting the learner-centred approach, the MoE focuses on the child as an individual rather than the child as part of a traditional community and fails to consider how factors outside the school impact on the child's learning. The general problem of the adoption of LCE by developing countries is illustrated in a comparison between the Fiji and Botswana education systems, to be discussed later.

Resolving deficiencies in schooling, for example, by incorporating traditional knowledge, calls for a close working relationship between the MoE and MTA, as the gatekeeper of Indigenous Fijian culture and the arbiter of chiefly disputes, to create an appropriate curriculum. Only working together can the two ministries, using a bottom-up approach, enhance cohesiveness within the community and between the community and school to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

[3] Both Professors Prasad and Narsey are retired academics. As parliamentarians, the latter has retired while the former is current.

Transitions from tradition to global

Fiji's transition from a traditional society to a modern nation can be depicted as a confluence of changes from traditions to accommodate modern values. This transition is defined by Inkeles and Smith (1974) as a continuum of development driven by different forces, such as colonialism, modernism and globalism. Forces, such as economic development and modernising institutions, change peoples' values and behaviour (Fagerlind & Saha, 1989). All societies undergo transformations from tradition to modernity and the different pace at which each advance creates a spectrum sometimes referred to as multiple modernities. This has consequences for an education system which requires a change in school practices to meet the demand for new skills and knowledge encouraged by new values. There currently exists a dominant international neoliberal ideology (Ball, 1998; Davies & Bansel, 2007), formulated as a global standard to homogenise the many variants of education systems existing among the array of cultures with different educational standards.

Neoliberal ideals became the guidelines for education reforms and involved policymaking to tighten relationships between politics, governance and education. Recognising the many differing cultural values and practices representing non-European perspectives, Escobar (2004, p. 208) argues for a "place-based epistemologies, economies and ecologies" model that acknowledges and respects alternative views which should be woven into a new theoretical framework, and "steer carefully away from the modern framework". One such alternative perspective is the Indigenous worldview. Consequently, contemporary educational institutions are attempting to create models to incorporate local cultures while meeting the UN sustainable development goals (UN, 2015). This move ties "education more closely to national economic interests . . . involv[ing] not only changes in organisational practices and methods but also the adoption of new social relationships, values and ethical principles (Ball, 1998, p. 125).

A major emphasis of the UN education target is quality learning and teaching outcomes (UN, 2015). Teachers' roles are central for the achievement of quality education, as well as their ability to mobilise global and local values by blending knowledges to create new knowledge and to meet the global targets. A study by Crossley et al. (2017) on quality education in Fiji recommended actions at the institutional, professional and student levels to reform the system. The authors stressed the importance of contextualising the "nature of quality" to facilitate a more nuanced strategy to meld global and local values. Part of their findings highlighted the local community views of teachers, but said little about the community per se. The case study in the present discussion represents a community whose members are disconnected by internal disputes, exacerbated by the local school's lack of support and scarcity of resources.

Quality teaching and learning in the 21st century

Many education scholars today believe that the best way to effectively teach students from diverse socio-economic, racial, linguistic, cultural and academic backgrounds is for teachers to establish rapport with the students' families to build "mutual respect, trust and appreciation of each other*"* (Epstein, 2013, p. 115; Krechevsky et al., 2010). Epstein calls this relationship a school, family, community partnerships. The emphasis on school, family, community partnerships has reinvigorated debates on the failures of the school system and on the obstacles to improving learning in schools. Some scholars

argue that school systems have failed because the skills and basic literacy of the industrial age no longer adequately serve the demands of the post-industrial economy and a rapidly globalising world. A more significant reason for academic underachievement among Indigenous students and minority groups, however, has to do with the quality of teaching and learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Indigenous scholars also believe that Indigenous knowledge, culture and language can help resolve the disengagement of Indigenous children in the classroom and improve academic achievement (Semali, 2014).

The difference between the study of education *in other cultures* and the study of other cultures *in education* raises the question of how to allow space for the articulation of Indigenous knowledge and concerns and their incorporation into the curriculum (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005). Advocating the necessity of creating education systems that work for Indigenous students, Tuhiwai-Smith (2005) argues that whether at the structural, curriculum, or pedagogical levels, the system must "work for teachers and students, and for communities and their cultural worldviews, practices and contemporary realities" (p. 34). In other words, Indigenous knowledge (IK) might be a large part of the solution for uniting a divided community such as Tawase village and addressing the underachievement of Indigenous children.

Calls to incorporate IK of the Pacific into the higher education curriculum are now often made (Puamau & Pene, 2009; Thaman, 2003). However, there has been little focus on strengthening school-community relations at the grassroots level. Some writers do highlight the need to reconcile IK and Western concepts to accommodate the changing values and demands of the 21st century (Nabobo-Baba, 2007; Thaman, 2012). Tiko et al. (2007) recommended that communal and relational concepts should be central in the training of Pacific Islands teachers. However, these writers give little attention to the inclusion of IK to strengthen community relations. Kedrayate (2001) argued for community participation in non-formal programs for self-development where common problems can be addressed. However, though she advocated collaborative methods of negotiation and dialogue rather than a top-down approach as the means by which non-formal education can help build a cohesive community (p. 20-21), she did not consider the importance of IK.

To reconfigure the incorporation of IK at the grassroots level, this paper provides an illustration of a way to address it. It maintains that in conjunction with the school and with the backing of the MoE and the MTA, IK can be the key to rejuvenating community relationships and trust for the enhancement of school, family, community partnerships and children's learning. My proposal is for a bottom-up approach involving the community and schoolteachers as agents for examining, selecting and adapting IK concepts. As a bedrock to build the *vanua*,[4] generative themes concerning traditions can strengthen relationships and learning through dialogue and collaboration and can open other creative ways of knowledge building.

[4] *Vanua* as a concept can mean land. It can also refer to environment, the people, culture and belief system.

Case study: Tawase village

At present about 60% of traditional Fijian chiefly positions have not been filled (Rawalai, 2020; Selaitoga, 2016). Yet in a hierarchical society like Fiji, filling such positions is crucial for important community decision-making. Problems of lack of communal cohesion and mutual caring have resulted especially from recurring disputes about chiefly titles which has impacted on cooperation in support of the school and children's education. Such is the case in Tawase.

Tawase village comprises about 50 households with a total population of approximately 250 people divided among three clans. The village has a primary school with four teachers and about 70 pupils from Tawase and two neighbouring villages and smaller settlements. A health centre, with a doctor and a nurse, and a post office serve an area of about 60 square miles. Approximately ten satellite villages traditionally defer to the leadership of Tawase village.

This case study concerns a rivalry between two factions, dating back to the creation of the chiefly title of Tawase in 1847. Two clans are rivals for the title and the third supports one of them. Ever since the creation of the chiefly title, disputing has loomed whenever the position becomes vacant. Especially in the last 50 years, the dispute has cut deeper into community cohesion, fragmenting the web of social capital and caring relations. When the title became vacant in 1973, the dispute also affected the ten satellite villages of Tawase. These social wounds continued to fester in the disputes of 2011 and 2016.

METHODOLOGY

The case study is based on archival records within and outside Fiji (Erskine, 1853; Hocart Fieldnotes, 1912, 1952), observation of activities, and interviews conducted intermittently since 1996. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2016-17 in two villages with 11 parents, a chief of a satellite village, a church minister, a teacher and a former staff member (both local). Interviews were also conducted in Suva, the capital city. Informants were asked about their thoughts on the chiefly title dispute, its impact on social relationships, the responsibilities of the chief in resolving conflicts, and especially the effect of the dispute on the daily running of the school and on children's learning.

Epstein (2010; 2013) believes that the three overlapping institutions of school, family and community should "glue" a community together. Relationships can strengthen social trust, mutual respect and appreciation, and the synergy of relationships can galvanise students' success in learning. In Epstein's model, a child's learning is affected by the school, family and community whether they work closely together or apart, in positive or negative ways. The other influence is the interpersonal relationships between individuals at home, school or community. Because these two levels of influence are deeply intertwined, children can be strongly affected by community discord.

The difficulty in recruiting informants representing each side directed the selection on a basis of "who supports who". For example, the group interviewed in Tawase consisted of a member of one party in the dispute and four others who were not "aligned" to either side. Informants from the other village represented the opposing party because the whole village were ardent supporters. The two local teachers, the chief of a satellite village and the church minister, as an outsider, were recruited as people who were

neutral. In a very personalised community such as Tawase, one can only rely on snowball sampling to select representations. As both an insider and outsider (living and working outside the country), it was important that I presented findings of my research, conducted over almost two decades, to the village meeting specifically organised by the TLFC and the provincial office.

INFORMANTS' ACCOUNTS

The chiefly dispute in 1973 involved two factions and their blood relations within the village of Tawase and immediate satellite villages. My informants reflected on the chiefly disputes of the last five decades either on the basis of oral history, passed down through several generations, or personal experience. Although most were not born in 1973 or were only a few years old, they were well informed about the dispute and its impact.

The last two disputes, in 2011 and 2016, involved a "war of words" during the TLFC presentations.[5] People who had conducted research were able to present their findings on historical roots, settlements and changes of status to challenge common assumptions about the history of the *vanua.*[6] Many interviewees found this experience baffling and shared a sense of dread, as conveyed in their comments on the three disputes and their effects on social relations:

> The one before [chiefly dispute in 1973] was not as destructive as this one [2016] . . . This one has brought deep divisions in all villages . . . It affected everyone. You could sense deep fractures everywhere. (40 yr male)
>
> We talk but that close relation is gone. (42 yr male)
>
> It's [talking to each other] hypocrisy – like a big *matavulo* (mask). (39 yr male)
>
> We are all related and that affects how we communicate. There are times we keep things to ourselves [mindful of the relationship] but the current dispute [2016] . . . the words they used we can't stomach. (42 yr male)
>
> E via 'oso'osola'ina sara ga a oda wawana (It's like our innards are all being cut up. (38 yr female).
>
> That deep wound remains . . . will never disappear . . . they will continue to *kabeti* [break like a twig] whenever they feel like it. (40 yr male).

These comments reveal that leaders, as well as the TLFC as an arbiter, have not made any attempt to reconcile, to restore trust and to recognise that everyone has a shared interest in and responsibility for children's development in order to improve their future opportunities. Resolutions are made by the TLFC deciding who is to fill the leadership position, but it does not consider reconciliation or peace-making its responsibility. When disputes are not resolved, there is no healing and people cannot move on because their thoughts and actions continue to orbit around the divide.

[5] To help settle disputes, a team from the TLFC visits the village to take statements from rival factions.

[6] Rival parties and other interested village members (such as the author of this paper who studied the history of the *vanua)* write in and present their petitions to TLFC. People are also given time to orally present during the inquiry.

The lack of cohesiveness in Tawase community also reflects incompetent leadership, a weak link in the school, family, community partnerships. Epstein's (2010) concept of care corresponds with Ravuvu's concept of values that hold an *iTaukei* community together. Based on reciprocation, values such as *veinanumi* (being considerate), *veivukei* (being helpful), *veilomani* (being loving or kind) and *yalovata* (of the same spirit), and others "bring harmony and solidarity to the community" (Ravuvu, 1988:8).

Community sinews

The most important asset in any village community should be blood links (Ravuvu, 1988; Toren, 1999). Strong blood relations, according to Ravuvu (1988), should help get things done whether to do with the community as a whole, a social function, or personal needs. But when village meetings or school-clean ups are avoided by villagers, when there are splits in church support, funerals and weddings are poorly attended, and the women's group is in disarray, there is a need for assistance from the MTA and MoE to garner community social capital, according to informants and personal observations. The problem of impoverished relationships is exacerbated by leadership that lacks full community support. The church minister in Tawase noted the declining of the traditional practice *takitaki*,[7] a way of strengthening bonds and a custom *iTaukei* take much pride in. When relationships are disconnected, customary practices that "glue" the community together wilt.

Impact on the school

Like any public institution in a village setting, the school is viewed as belonging to the *vanua* and any activity that concerns the school should draw the support of every member of the community. But the acrimonious division in the village led to neglect of regular cleaning of the school compound and lack of support for fund raising activities.

> It reached a point where they [other community members] denied that the school belonged to the *vanua,* but only to the parents whose children are attending the school . . . and we would stress to them, this is the school for the *vanua* . . . Tawase District School . . . No, only parents continue to shoulder everything. (42 yr male)

The lack of basic support from the community has meant that teachers, who mainly come from Tawase or surrounding villages, must shoulder much of the organisation and solicitation of funds through their various links in the community. The empty bank account, as recounted by the school manager, meant a lack of stationery for pupils and very little money for sports team tours, transport costs to district or national competitions and other excursions. A positive is that the school has provided a safe place for pupils to distance themselves from the village fracas. However, pupils still vent their cynicism:

> They're back again [TLFC on its second visit] . . . why exactly are they meddling with that useless [chiefly] position. I wonder who is going to be selected? It's just us who are going to suffer, us kids. (A pupil's statement related by the teacher).

[7] *Takitaki* is the sharing of a plate or baskets of food with a neighbour, depending on the occasion, or an "out-of-the-ordinary" dish to share with the neighbour, especially if they have visitors. See Toren (2009) for an account of the function of *takitaki* in cementing relations.

To sum up, the problems faced by the pupils of Tawase village are lack of community support, extended family splits, low funds, social restrictions, insufficient learning resources and negative social vibes, all of which can harmfully affect their learning. Some of these problems exist in many Indigenous Fijian rural schools (Report of the Fiji Education Commission 2000), but Tawase school has the added problem of a deep division within its community.

Epstein's school, family, community partnerships may work well in a modern economy because families are financially autonomous, unlike an Indigenous rural context where resources are shared between families. Such practices are necessary in a subsistence economy where resources are scarce. The values of "share and care" cement these practices, which reinforces community relationships. But the learner-centred approach that is now part of the MoE policy compounds the fractious situation of Tawase community because the individualist values taught cannot help glue the community's web of links.

LESSON FROM BOTSWANA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

A case comparable to Fiji's vexed education system is from Botswana. In his assessment of Botswana's education system, Tabulawa (2009) doubted the implementation of the LCE would develop learners' attributes, such as creative, innovative, versatile and critical thinking, because of the contradictions and paradoxes within the education system. Yet, these attributes are considered by many neoliberal educators to be, "the vehicle to drive societies and economy from mainly agricultural bases into modern and knowledge-based societies which will bring economic benefits" (Tabulawa, 2009, p. 93, quoting Castell, 1997).

According to Tabulawa, given the under-resourcing of schools, high unemployment, lack of infrastructure, poverty and the gaps and tensions between the old and the new curriculum, which is expected to accommodate a hybridity of local variations and neoliberal ideals, the transformation will need a new kind of autonomous learner. To mediate between variations in local cultures, and then integrate local values with liberal ideas, necessitates a reorientation of education which requires "a new form of schooling, new ethos and new demands for teachers" (p. 94). These new demands will require an autonomous learner or a self-programmable learner (p. 88, quoting Castell, 1997). A later study by Makwinja (2017) similarly found that Botswana's education system needed an overhaul in order to refashion a "new kind of learner". The study concluded that to address the gaps and tensions between the local context and global values, Botswana's MoE must consult the community on the type of education they want for their children. Parents also must be more involved with their children's education. Crucially, the curriculum has to be more culture and context sensitive. These problems are comparable to Fiji's. However, while Botswana is open to curriculum change to meld local tradition and modern values, Fiji's situation has remained unchanged

DISCUSSION

A central concern of this study is to consider the applicability of Epstein's model of school, family, community partnerships to a traditional Fijian setting as exemplified by

the village of Tawase. As explained, Tawase lacks the collective and relational trust that could help resolve social problems and strengthen relational links, providing necessary ingredients for the robust and effective partnership among the three institutions of school, community and family. Epstein's partnership model is based on a US school model that puts emphasis on individual autonomy. While this may be helpful in an urban school in Fiji, it is unlikely to work in a traditional, homogenous group-oriented community. The traditional culture does not accommodate individual agency easily and change will only be accepted if it is supported by those at the upper echelon, which is unlikely.

A question on whether changing the school curriculum to focus on strengthening the *vanua* can be effective invited an informant's comment that also reflected the view of others: "There is a chance of success in implementing changes [in the school] but only if there is an intervention from the Ministry of Education" (30-year-old female). Intervention from the state will not help to resolve factionalism and social breakdown. However, stakeholders such as the MoE and TLFC should intervene with the view of empowering villagers to build community cohesion and support for the school.

Totoka village and school

Hoare's (2004) study of a primary school in the village of Totoka is perhaps a useful guide to an appropriate implementation of school, family, community partnerships. Totoka and its school are largely isolated from global influences. But the village has a communally owned tourist resort that strengthens social relationships and contributes to the livelihood of the community and its school. Experience in tourism has given the people a general understanding of the dependence of a village microcosm on global economic shifts and demands.[8] Totoka is economically self-sufficient, relying partly on a subsistence economy and partly on employment in the resort. Despite the changes brought by engagement with tourism, the villagers have retained many traditional practices and values in their everyday lives. Unlike Totoka, Tawase relies heavily on subsistence farming. But it now needs to incorporate new economic and entrepreneurial programs to guide the people into socio-economic activities which the MTA is currently promoting in rural villages (iTaukei Affairs Act Draft, 2016). This may break the traditional social rigidity in villages like Tawase.

In her discussion of the degree of independence enjoyed by Totoka's school and the important role blood relations and loyalty play in how and why villagers contribute to the school, Hoare (2004) made two recommendations: 1. Villagers' views and understanding of the role of the school should guide training for teachers and adult programs for the community. 2. Programs that aim at changing community behaviours should engage the interest of the community and work in concert with its established forms of cooperation. Hoare found that when educators work within the community protocol of Totoka, interactions between school and community are positive. To create a climate in which IK is upheld, though with some necessary changes, the MTA contribution to education programs must involve both the community and the school.

[8] The coups of 1987 and 2000 and their impacts on tourism have given villagers an understanding of how such events can affect the economy and their livelihoods when tourists stop coming into the country.

Fiji Ministry of Education

The 2016 curriculum reform is mainly Western-oriented with an emphasis on LCE, a concept that has failed in many developing countries (O'Donoghue, 1994; Tabulawa, 2009). Schweisfurth's (2011) review of LCE implementations across the globe highlights four important findings: 1. problems with the nature of reform and its implementation; 2. poor human and material resources; 3. failure to address the interface of different cultures; 4. lack of power and agency (p. 425). These are critical issues that the MoE must address when implementing curriculum changes, especially in introducing LCE to a traditional society. In Fiji, the LCE concept focuses on the child's learning in ways disconnected from his or her community values. Addressing this problem should incorporate the need for the Indigenous community to be more flexible to accommodate new values and views and/or adapting traditional practices.

Should schools have a role in upholding culture?

The idea of teaching a culturally "relevant curriculum" was first promoted by the 1969 Education Commission. Later, two ministers of education, Mr. Semesa Sikivou in 1978 (Ratubalavu, 2021, p. 6) and Taufa Vakatale (Singh, 1992, p. 40) in 1992, advocated inclusion of traditional values and character building in the curriculum, especially share and care values. Share and care values involve reciprocal sharing of material possessions, food, workload and time, to name a few, or to show care such as the practice of *takitaki* (see p. 11). These aspects of culture are relevant to daily life and glue people together as a community. Yet, over the last 40 years, the MoE has shown little interest in incorporating traditional values into the curriculum.

Sadler's account of public submissions during the Education Commission of 2000 advocated that schools support local cultures. He recognised the complexity of the situation where two sets of aims collide, acknowledging that there can be a clash of priorities where traditional values and practices take a back seat or are devalued in a crowded curriculum. Sadler (2000) emphasises that the sites for strongest learning of traditional values are within village communities and that:

> [T]he family and the community should retain substantial responsibility for those aspects of growing up, of maturation, of behaviours and customs and traditions, of the culture of social and personal development, of physical development, of life matters, of the multitude of practical things that have been traditionally passed on. (p. 273)

However, Sadler also stressed that the school must share in this responsibility. He recommended that stakeholders must work with the community "to stimulate development in local values and culture, . . . so that the school is seen to value and reinforce these key elements of cultural life" (p. 274).

An example of a "space" where local and global pedagogical and epistemological integration can occur is illustrated in the *covu*, meaning where knowledge is imparted, filtered and examined, skills are acquired and a change of attitude is a likely outcome (Varani-Norton, 2017, p. 142). *Covu* is the space where the learner personally considers their beliefs and experiences, and reassess, in conjunction with what is being learned, whether to change or reaffirm their attitudes and behaviour. Each lesson, project or activity should have a Fijian value to which the content relates to actively engage

students/learners. For instance, the *iTaukei* value of *sautu*, defined as living in peace and plenty, or a state of abundance and wealth as opposed to famine. Concepts such as sustainability, conservation and preservation should centre on the teaching by elders of knowledge and skills in, for example, weaving of fish traps, or the building of *moka* (fish 'cropping') along the shore or reef. Such knowledge can be broadened and linked to understanding environmental sustainability and climate change at the national and international level. It can also extend to relationship building at local, national, and even at international levels. For this approach to education, support from both teachers and community members is critical.

In a deeply divided community like Tawase village, a major "sinew" that can help tie the community together is support for tradition by incorporating IK in the curriculum and by community members participating in developing and teaching the content. Grounding learning in local knowledge, starting with the villagers' everyday lived experience, can act as a springboard to connecting students/learners to national and global issues. Connecting local to national and global issues and comparing traditional and modern values are important foundations to help villagers and their children learn to grapple with modernity, come to terms with conceptual changes, attempt to resolve the contradictions and, if necessary, change their behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Epstein's model of school, family, community partnerships is advocated as a basis for promoting community integration, engendering trust and a reinforcement for an LCE. However, this model has major limitations if implemented in a traditional Fijian school and its community. It is based on Western experience where the demography of a community is often ethnically diverse and multicultural, and where the focus is usually on strengthening social relationships in a modern economy. The context in this study is very different. Village Tawase is largely subsistence-based, ethnically homogenous, yet bitterly divided and deficient in trust. It needs rejuvenation as a caring community to strengthen its social capital. Moreover, LCE is not in harmony with the local community because its values, emphasising individual agency, are not consistent with community values and do not accord with what members expect schools to teach, such as share and care values. Children should learn both traditional and new values that can best sustain the community.

The comparison between Totoka and Tawase schools raises two important issues: the contrast between the cohesive community relations of Totoka and villagers' flexibility for change, and Tawase's fragmented relations that have depleted school support and learning. But both schools are teaching a curriculum that emphasises Western values despite the wishes of both communities that the teaching of traditional values should be an essential part of the curriculum. The MoE and TLFC role will be critical for incorporating traditional values in the curriculum and building and strengthening the social fabric of vulnerable communities like Tawase. However, the current top-down approach by the MoE will be an obstacle to empowering the community to help design their own curriculum.

To achieve a holistic approach to addressing the needs of communities such as Tawase, the MoE and the TLFC should collaborate to create a curriculum that facilitates a multi-pronged program. Such a program should incorporate information to guide villagers in selecting and developing important aspects of tradition to be taught in school and

practised in the village. As the custodian of tradition, the onus will be on the community to sustain the values taught, to strengthen social norms, invigorate community networking, and improve learning outcomes.

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The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 20, No 3, 2021
http://iejcomparative.org

A Collaborative Creative Work

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Ka Pō Ho'iho'i –

Black as the Spectrum in Unity

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Three poems for Fäeag Rotuạm ta (Rotuman language) revitalisation in Aotearoa New Zealand

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(Re)turning to *loto*, igniting *mālie* and *māfana*: Tongan *maau* and *faiva* as expressed rhythmic entanglement

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These three works are first framed with a poem collated by Mere Taito. The cover art, *Ka Pō Ho'iho'i - Black as the Spectrum in Unity* (2020), builds upon a conversation ignited by Dr Sarah Jane Moore's *Lunar Mother,* and her invitation to collaborate. The dialogue began via zoom connecting Dr. Moore with three other Pacific scholars based at the University of Waikato in Kirikiriroa-Hamilton, Aotearoa-New Zealand: Dr David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae from Tonga, Mere Taito from Rotuma, and Dr Nālani Wilson-Hokowhitu from Hawai'i.

Upon reflecting on the poems "Fạgi", "Tạn Folu", and "Ho'ag Ne Sås Ta**"**, Mere Taito expresses how her creative project speaks to *Ka Pō Ho'iho'i* (2020), as it is also way of "**re**turning, a **re**turning to her heritage language Fäeag Rotuạm ta which has become rusty and broken along the way because of the lack of 'proper keeping'." Her creative contribution summarises her present work toward a creative doctorate. Dr Fa'avae communicates how he calls "potent spiritual energies that ignite the loto, laumālie, and 'atamai (soul, spirit, and mind)." Thus, also articulating potentiality, which he explores within cultural sources, maau (poetry) and faiva (dance). All of the submissions express the vitality of language, culture, genealogy, poetry, creativity and identity.

A Found Return

Collated by Mere Taito

[1]langakali!
did you begin to wonder?
whether I would ever return?
would you see me again
amidst the darkness and the soot
of our burnt-out fale?
[2]come!
you me go to the place
where dialogue ends and dialogic lives
where
[3]a woman plants a whenua
skin to skin
in black and white
a return to the source

1. *Langakali*. 1981. Konai Helu Thaman
2. *People language people*. 2014. Leilani Tamu
3. *Tarawera*. 1992. Roma Potiki.

This watercolour on paper painting Ka Pō Hoʻihoʻi – Black as the Spectrum in Unity (2020), is the first in a developing series by Nālani Wilson-Hokowhitu. It is a celebration of our Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) genealogical connections to Pō, the beginnings of creation, as an abundant source of potentiality. Born from stars, humans are comprised of the same elements, such as carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen. As we more profoundly consider these interconnections, what does this mean to the fundamental rights of other planets? What can we learn from Indigenous Studies about how to more respectfully voyage into the universe?

Three poems for Fäeag Rotuạm ta (Rotuman language) revitalisation in Aotearoa New Zealand

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In the bustling field of language revitalisation, an Oceanic language isolate in Aotearoa New Zealand, is being given niu *life. Fäeag Rotuạm ta, which has the United Nations endangerment status of vulnerable, is the language of approximately 15,000 Rotuman Islanders. In response to these deficit narratives of "endangerment" and "vulnerability", Rotuman Islanders, particularly in the diaspora, have gathered to act on their deep and innate cultural connections to Fäeag Rotuạm ta. Equally in resistance and pride, these acts have resulted in remarkable community-based language revitalisation initiatives.*

Language revitalisation can also be manifested in creative writing output. Pasifika creative literature since the 1950s has produced novels, short stories and poems that have spoken to and against societal angst. In this creative paper, I present and discuss three poems that respond to the decline in Fäeag Rotuạm ta language use.

Keywords: poetry; language activism; language revitalisation; creative practice research

INTRODUCTION

The poems "Fạgi", "Tạn Folu", and "Ho'ag Ne Sås Ta**"** were written by me as "discovery pieces" during COVID lockdown restrictions in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2020, specifically during February to November. A period of discovery writing was part of my application process for a PhD in Creative Practice at the University of Waikato, in Aotearoa New Zealand. This time of creative experimentation allowed me to clearly articulate my research goals, objectives, and vision for poetic text as a valid domain for the rejuvenation of Fäeag Rotuạm ta in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Fäeag rotuạm ta

Fäeag Rotuạm ta is the heritage language of Rotuman Islanders, a group of Pacific people indigenous to the island of Rotuma: a territorial dependency of the Republic of Fiji, situated approximately three hundred km north of Fiji. It is estimated that there are 15,000 Rotuman Islanders globally, most of whom reside in Fiji. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Rotuman Islanders account for one of the smallest, if not the smallest, group of Pacific Islanders with a recorded population of 980 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018.). It can be argued that the transnational spread of Rotuman Islanders has contributed to the weakening vitality of Fäeag Rotuạm ta, which has consequently led

to the United Nations declaring and placing Fäeag Rotuạm ta within the "endangerment" status of "vulnerable" (UNESCO, 2017). Other ethnolinguistic conditions have contributed to Fäeag Rotuạm ta language vulnerability, but a critical analysis of these conditions is outside the scope of this creative paper and will not be addressed here.

Creatives and language revitalisation

A survey of language revitalisation literature shows that the contributions of creatives, such as musicians, creative writers and animators within the space of language revitalisation are often undervalued. National-level and state-funded language revitalisation curriculum initiatives through community bilingual and immersion schools have received more scholarly attention. Against this disparity and at this early stage of my doctoral journey (three months in and many more to go!), I have positioned poetic text—a language-based creative artform—as a potentially effective platform for the revitalisation of Fäeag Rotuạm ta in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Of all the genres of creative literature, poetry is ideal for the work of language revitalisation. Poetry is quick to produce and has the versatility of form; it can shape-shift when you need it to. In the recently published anthology of poetry in endangered languages titled *Poems from the Edge of Extinction*, McCabe (2019, p. 4) identifies the habit of poets "to rise" in response to the "decline of a language". A survey of Pasifika poets has shown that the functional use of poetry for decolonial and political purposes was and is not uncommon (McDougall, 2014; Perez, 2020; Wilson, 2017).

In this paper, I present the poems "Fạgi", "Tạn Folu", and "Ho'ag Ne Sȧs Ta**"** and describe briefly how each poem negotiates the visibility of Fäeag Rotuạm ta in relation to English. Note, the descriptions will focus on the "visual and spatial" play of Fäeag Rotuạm ta and English language text rather than a deconstruction of literary meaning and figurative device use.

Each poem was laid-out in Canva™, an online open-source graphic design platform after they were drafted and finalised in Word. Canva was used because of its intuitive strengths and its range of functionalities.

POEM 1: FẠGI

In 'Fạgi', a visual hierarchy between Fäeag Rotuạm ta and English is established (Figure 1). Text colouring, text bolding, and maximising the font size of the title centres Fäeag Rotuạm ta as the dominant language in the poem. Greying the English language text reinforces this hierarchy. The English language has the specific purpose of translation: it "fetches" meaning and does so dutifully without interfering with the colourful display of Fäeag Rotuạm ta.

The column alignment of text in the body of the poem is an attempt to emulate the graphic display of a text corpus. At the same time, the accompanying colour-coding categorises the Fäeag Rotuạm ta text into their parts of speech. An iconic image of a line drawing of a writing hand, substantially reduced in transparency, sits in the poem's background. Its highly minimised level of transparency is intended to have the same effect as the greyed English language text: to quietly complement the flamboyant colouring, bolding and sizing of Fäeag Rotuạm ta text.

Figure 1: Fạgi

POEM 2: TẠN FOLU

Unlike the line drawing in "Fạgi", the iconic image of a water droplet in "Tạn Folu" (Figure 2) is not subtle. Its function is not to complement the visual features of Fäeag Rotuạm ta, but rather to set the spatial boundaries of language play between English and Fäeag Rotuạm ta text that is within three "water" spaces marked as *tạn*, *tạnu*, and *tạntạn*.

Furthermore, unlike 'Fạgi', the English language in "Tạn Folu" does not play a translatory role. Instead, it sets the metaphorical and idiomatic (as opposed to literal) context for Fäeag Rotuạm ta usage. In a sense, the English language and Fäeag Rotuạm ta text in "Tạn Folu" are working in tandem to create meaning. By word count (44 vs 27), however, the English language text has greater "presence". The lower number of Fäeag Rotuạm ta text is compensated by text colouring, bolding, and sizing: graphic features which allow Fäeag Rotuạm ta text to "pop" among black coloured English text and an overpowering central water droplet.

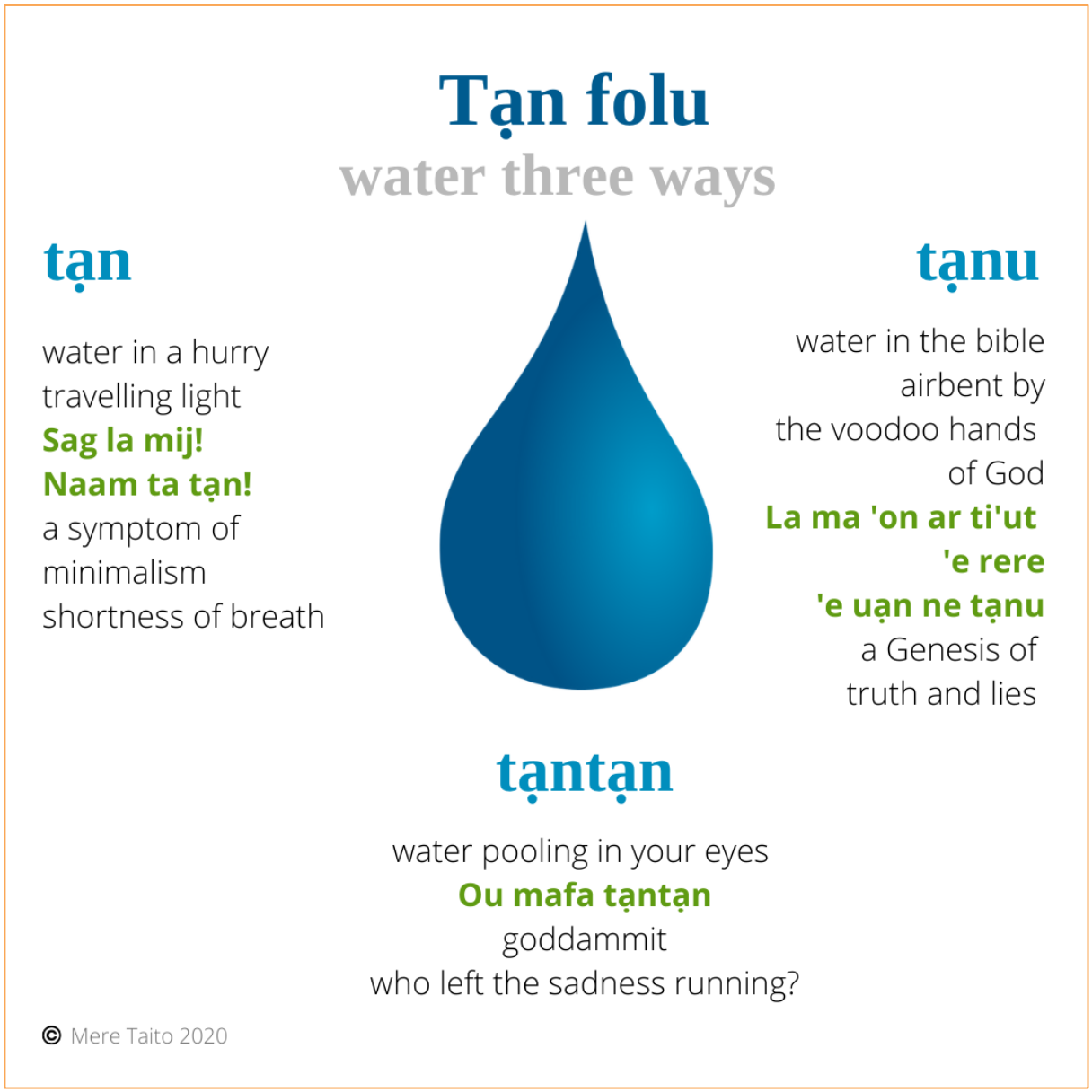

Figure 2: Tạn Folu

POEM 3: HO'AG NE SÀS TA

In "Ho'ag Ne Sàs Ta**"** (Figure 3), Fäeag Rotuạm ta has limited visibility: in the title and four lines within the body of the poem. Text colouring, bolding, and sizing are applied to enhance the visibility of Fäeag Rotuạm ta within this symmetrical four block-structured poem. Despite its restricted visibility, Fäeag Rotuạm ta usage and text provide the grounds and purpose for the English language to "act" and "do". In a way, Fäeag Rotuạm ta wields control over the function the English language adopts. In 'Ho'ag Ne Sàs Ta', the English language carries out two broad functions: provide a literal translation and expand on the context of the salt-passing instructions. To a large extent, the role of the English language here is pedagogical: to teach and elaborate on the meaning and therefore work *for* the Fäeag Rotuạm ta text.

Figure 3: Ho'ag Ne Sàs Ta

The iconic image of the salt shaker provides a visual reprieve to a wall of text and enhances the subject of salt passing. It is positioned to allow as much real estate for Fäeag Rotuạm ta and English language text. Unlike "Tạn Folu", "Ho'ag Ne Sàs Ta**"** is text-heavy.

CONCLUSION

The writing of "Fạgi", "Tạn Folu", and "Ho'ag Ne Sàs Ta**"** has shown me a number of possibilities in the way that heritage languages like Fäeag Rotuạm ta can interact and negotiate space with dominant languages like English in creative poetic texts. Visual features like text colouring, bolding, sizing, iconic imaging, and the "strategic" placement of text can be exploited to make heritage languages like Fäeag Rotuạm ta more accessible and visible within a poetic frame. The functions played by English—translatory and pedagogical—do not subvert the Fäeag Rotuạm ta text but rather

enhance and complement its graphic visibility and semantic (meaning) accessibility. This enhancement, I would argue, is crucial to the aims of language revitalisation.

As "discovery pieces", "Fạgi", "Tạn Folu", and "Ho'ag Ne Sàs Ta" have been marked as the foundational poems of a collection of bi/translingual Fäeag Rotuạm ta–English poems titled *Kave(ia) Tạn Kạl Ta: Mark the Round Water* (Figure 4). This collection will be developed as the creative artefact of my doctoral creative practice research.

Figure 4: Kave(ia) Tạn Kạl Ta: Mark the Round Water

This doctoral research is an exciting opportunity to further investigate the relationships and interactions between Fäeag Rotuạm ta and English within a language-based creative artform such as poetry, for the purpose of Fäeag Rotuạm ta revitalisation in Aotearoa.

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The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 20, No 3, 2021
http://iejcomparative.org

(Re)turning to *loto*, igniting *mālie* and *māfana*: Tongan *maau* and *faiva* as expressed rhythmic entanglement

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To charm the loto *is a (re)turn to our Indigenous Pacific knowings and becomings. Such a return is heart-warming and a fascination with spiritual reverence. Calling forth* mālie *and* māfana*, the potent spiritual energies that ignite the* loto*,* laumālie *and* 'atamai *(soul, spirit and mind), I appreciate and embrace the call to (re)turn to our ways. As cultural sources,* maau *(poetry) and* faiva *(dance) permit ways in which Tongan knowledges are expressed, mediated and shared. I foreground* mālie *and* māfana *as coupled spirits expressed as (re)presentations of rhythmic entanglement which are portrayed and unpacked through Tongan* maau *and* faiva*. Igniting* mālie *and* māfana *affirms the Indigenising of practice in the postcolonial* Moana *that evokes rhythmic sensibilities, grounded in the ways Tongan and other indigenous Pacific communities exist and connect materially and spiritually across their worlds.*

Keywords: Pacific Studies; poetry; mālie*;* māfana*; rhythmic entanglement;* Moana

AN INSPIRATION: IN INTELLECTUAL ADVENTUROUSNESS

A calling is an action that activates not only our hearing but also other forms of sensibilities. Academia does not always value such sensibilities. The call to position the prefix (re), in brackets, as well as the utilisation of and references to *Lea faka-Tonga* (Tongan language) in this paper is a purposeful and symbolic call for resistance, a kind of disobedience which challenges academic writing norms and epistemes that privilege dominant Western thought and writing (Fa'avae, 2021; McDowall & Ramos, 2017). In light of the global pandemic, on top of existing climate challenges and the societal ills linked to racial and gender discrimination, engaging in the (re) is a timely act to look back to go forward and think anew of possibilities for Indigenous Pacific peoples in the diaspora. (Re)thinking our forms of (re)presentations, through language and cultural practices is a creatively inspiring adventure (Fehoko, 2015).

The beating heart echoes, rhythm
The aching soul whines, rhythm
Waves crashing and relentless, rhythm
Weaving binding tension and entangled, rhythm

Within the poem are utterances that echoes a type of rhythmic (re)citation felt across inter-disciplinary spaces. The poem embodies a motivation for intellectual adventure beyond the boundaries of the academe and into the world familiar to *Moana* and Pacific Indigenous scholars. Intellectual adventurousness to me is synonymous with

creativity and inspiration, a desire to navigate into unchartered terrains "beyond" and into the unknown. Such navigation "beyond" is symbolic of *tala*'s (story's) place and function in relation to *noa* (an unknown, nothing-ness, something). Tecun et al. (2018) refers to *noa* as "a state of balance, a condition of equilibrium, or calibration between relationships" (p. 160). Like the *vahanoa* (the open sea, expansive space) (see Ka'ili, 2017), the poem echoes a type of intellectualising that privileges deep (*lōloto*) thinking from within—*loto* (soul) and *laumālie* (spirit). The late great Teresia Teaiwa (2011) unfolded deep learning as being likened to an emergence from the fundamental basis of learning linked to a qualitative change in a person's view of reality. For Teresia, learning is a deeply intimate experience that requires an appreciation of depth-work (*lōloto*) into the *loto*.

Tongan scholar, the late Futa Helu, established a critical site at the 'Atenisi Institute in which he weaved together the synergies between Tongan and Western thought and philosophies (classical traditions linked to Greek and Roman knowledge). The late 'Epeli Hau'ofa's (1994) positioning of *Moana* and Sea of Islands as constructs that move theoretical framing beyond Western understanding that the ocean itself is a source and connector of people, ideas, cultures, artefacts, and languages. Hūfanga 'Okusitino Māhina (2010), a student of Futa Helu, was instrumental in the development of *tā-vāism*, a theory of reality grounded in the depths of the *moana* and symbolic of time and space theorisations. Similarly, Siosiua Lafitani, another Tongan scholar influenced by his predecessors, continues to also push beyond the boundaries of philosophical speculation, beginning and focusing theorisations and philosophising from Tongan worldviews using Tongan concepts and approaches. Helu, Hau'ofa, Māhina, and Lafitani are believed to be *Moana*/Oceanic/Tongan thought leaders who are not only adventurous but also have a willingness to go beyond and push academic, cultural and philosophical traditions beyond Western thought. They continue to *fakaivia*—inspire and empower many Tongan/*Moana*/Pacific educators and scholars in the region. We draw inspiration from their sense of intellectual adventurousness by bringing together Tongan language and ideas to make sense and articulate (re)presentations of dominant Western notions and framings of poetry and dance through *mālie* and *māfana*. The deep musing of ways to honour *Lea faka-Tonga* (Tongan language) yet connect with the lived realities of generations of Tongan people in the diaspora has allowed for introspection, reflection and contemplation that go beyond my own subjectivities. A deep musing that honours our multiple connections and inter-connections with others or matters—living and non-living—in the world. This kind of mattering is rhythmic, poetic, *mālie* (uplifting and inspiring) and *māfana* (heartfelt).

The Māori literary scholar, Alice Te Punga Somerville (2020) in a recent keynote where she examined Fijian lawyer and poet Pio Manoa's essay alongside work by other Pacific poets during the mid-70s, articulated the criticality of Manoa's work in portraying the deep inter-connections between ideologies, ideas and practices within people and small island nations in the *Moana*. Te Punga Somerville emphasised the significance of moving beyond just providing a commentary on sources to processes that involve introspection, interrogation, reflection and contemplation. I often rely on Helu (2012) and his work for inspiration and to ground my interrogation, reflection and contemplation of Tongan poetry and dance (see also Helu, 2011). At the same time, I turn to Indigenous, Pacific studies, and postcolonial scholars like Helu (2011), Teaiwa (2011) and Ka'ili (2017) for guidance on how to appropriately position and re-present Tongan knowledges within the field. Indigenous scholar and writer of the

Cree people from Canada, Shawn Wilson (2001) argues that Indigenous (re)searchers "need to move beyond [just providing] an Indigenous perspective" (p. 175), rather a move to think, frame, and even express from or through an Indigenous paradigm.

The Māori philosopher Carl Mika (2017) places the human self as being deeply connected and inseparable from the materiality of the world. He articulates that, from an Indigenous worlded viewpoint, "if there is an incongruent logic at all, it is the one that emerges as a clash between the tendency of dominant western thought [and traditions] to iron out varying truths and the Indigenous insistence that those contradictions are truthful." (p. 49). This means that, Indigenous peoples may not have a problem with the "simultaneous separateness/togetherness of all things" (p. 49). The problem would be in the ways dominant Western thought and traditions attempt to dismiss and banish that kind of thinking as being illogical.

RHYTHMIC ENTANGLEMENT WITHIN THE *VĀ:* SENSE-MAKING MEANING-MAKING

Making sense of "rhythm" is juxtaposed with the meaning making of "entanglement". They both provide a sense of opposition and disharmony, particularly when it comes to understanding our "inter-connections" (*vā*) within the world. Although entanglement can sometimes emit a complicated feeling of disharmony and the compromising of relationships, it does offer philosophical speculation that positions time and space as constructs of meaning-making and sense-making. Disharmony in relation to entanglement, therefore, is but one layer to theorise connections or inter-connections within a holism approach to making meaning of the world. Through the metaphysics of time and space, *tā-vā* takes a form of Tongan framing of the world which prioritises speculation as deeply rooted and grounded in one's presence in the world. Hūfanga 'Okusitino Māhina (2010), Telesia Kalavite (2019), as well as Tevita Ka'ili (2017) are but a handful of Tongan theorists who have deliberately invested time and energy in the development and depth-work required to unpack and articulate the rhythms of *tā-vā* that are indispensable of time and space conceptualisation and practice across various disciplines, such as anthropology, education, art, Pacific studies and architecture (see Ka'ili, 2017).

In the figurative sense, rhythmic entanglement is a space of negotiation and connection within *vā* (relational space) and is expressed within the *loto*. Conceptually, rhythmic entanglement is an idea that embraces and captures the ways in which *mālie* and *māfana* find their form and take shape within the *vā* and through shared sources––the proximity between poetry and dance, for instance. Furthermore, I articulate rhythmic entanglement within Tongan *maau* (poetry) and *faiva* (dance) because within the *vā* they awaken and *fakaivia* into consciousness as states of inspiration, empowerment, joy and elation.

Rhythmic entanglement can seemingly portray (re)presentations of struggle and complication. However, it can also relate to cooperating relationships or situations through intense contemplation, and extensive and in-depth negotiations. Such entanglements are symbolic of the unfolding of *noa*, when the temporal and spiritual worlds inter-connect, seeking for some kind of harmonious relations (Māhina, 2010; Tecun et al., 2018)—a sense and condition of seeking equilibrium within the *vā* space of inter-relations. The performance becomes the observed and the negotiations of such symbolic knowledges begin to take shape through *mālie* and *māfana*. Tongan

theorist and education (re)searcher, Linitā Manu'atu (2000) unfolds *mālie*'s many forms. She begins with the way in which *mālie* is expressed as *hangamālie* (spirit in focus), *māmālie* (spirit in movement), *fe'ungamālie* (spirit of sufficiency), *langimālie* (spirit of healthy living), *maaumālie* (spirit of orderliness), *tu'umālie* (spirit of wealth and abundance), and *napangapangamālie* (the spirit of connectedness) (Manu'atu, 2000; 2017).

"*Tuli ke ma'u hono ngaahi mālie moe māfana*" is how Tongan scholar and educator, Linitā Manu'atu (2014) inspire Tongan scholars to draw from the wisdom of *mālie* and embrace Tongan language and culture. For me as an early career academic, I build on Manu'atu's conceptualisation of *mālie* as a life force or spirit that can also be descriptively defined as the "energising and uplifting of spirits to a positive state of connectedness and enlightenment" (see Fa'avae, 2016, p. 14). *Māfana* is often associated with *mālie* and can be expressed as inwardly warm feelings that are intimately connected to the energising and uplifting of spirits which are both embodied within one's *loto* (soul, heart).

TU'U-FONUA, *NOFO-FONUA*, AND *MOANA* BEINGS AND BECOMINGS

Tongan scholar Teena Brown Pulu (2002) used *turangawaewae* and *tu'ungava'e* as Māori and Tongan terms to describe a "place to stand" (p. 14). Their figurative meaning is linked to one's sense of grounding, connection and belonging. For some Tongan academics who find their grounding as settlers in other *whenua* Indigenous to peoples from that particular land, being open to exploring notions like *tu'ungava'e* in connection with *fonua* (land) can provide nuanced understanding of belonging, being and becoming in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ). *Manu'atu* (2005) articulates two inter-related concepts: *tu'ufonua* (being indigenous) and *nofofonua* (residing as a settler in another land/county). Hau'ofa (1994) positioned "Oceania" as the ever-expanding and overarching construct that connected Pacific people to others and the world. For Hau'ofa (1994), the *Moana* (Oceania, ocean) reference became the critical tool or frame in which to overturn the hegemonic views that confine and restrict appropriate understandings of the "Moana being" as (re)presentative of our lived realities.

Hau'ofa (1994) claims, for Pacific people to truly break away from colonial influences, recognising their potential is necessary. Postcolonial scholar Edward Said (1978) warns us, a complete wholesale rejection of Western knowledge and scholarship is unhelpful. At the same time, Tongan linguist, Melenaite Taumoefolau (2011) argues for the significance of injecting Indigenous Pacific languages, knowledges and worldviews when unpacking and decolonising Western constructs and ideals in the *Moana*. Central to the decolonisation process is the mastering of the "coloniser's language and our own [Pacific]" (Taumoefolau, 2011, p. 70). Recognising our potential, as advocated by Hau'ofa (1994), can be achieved when Pacific language and Indigenous knowledges are utilised in the interrogation of *Moana* "beings" and observed performances.

Pacific regional scholar of Tongan heritage, Seu'ula Johansson Fua (2016), argues for a "relational, hybrid and dialogic approach to creating a third space for the Oceanic (re)searcher to work within" (p. 35). Her use of *motutapu* (sacred island) as sites and spaces of rest, rejuvenation and protection for travellers during their arduous navigation, is symbolic of Oceanic (re)searchers' sense of being and becoming as local and global activators of change and transformation. Fundamental to Johansson

Fua's (2016) claim, guided by her mentor 'Ana Maui Taufe'ulungaki (2001), is the need for Oceanic (re)searchers to "dig deeper to understand cultural values, belief systems and philosophies that underpin Pacific systems and structures, to always ask questions such as: whose knowledge? Whose cognitive and philosophical theories? Whose (re)search paradigms, whose methodologies, techniques and procedures?" (p. 8). They encourage *Moana*/Tongan scholars to do the *lōloto* and in-depth interrogation of the ways in which Indigenous Tongan knowledge systems and realities can make sense of global agendas.

MAAU: POETRY AS FELT RECITATIONS

Helu's work has always provided in-depth appreciation of Indigenous knowledge systems and practices. Helu (2012) categorises Tongan poetry chronologically into ancient and modern. Ancient Tongan poetry is referred to as a *fakatangi*, a "chanted short ballad" (Helu, 2012, p. 48). Modern poetry however, consists of five forms—the *sipi* (a wooing madrigal recited by the suitor to his beloved or vice versa), the dance *lakalaka,* the *hiva kakala* (love lyric), the dance *ma'ulu'ulu*, and the *langi* (a composition to accompany a solo dance or *tau'olunga*). A key point articulated by Helu (2012) is that both ancient and modern poetry (various forms) are performed through song, chants or dances.

Soyini Madison's (1999) articulation of theory and performativity as a "coupling" process acknowledges the strong inter-connection between knowledge as theoretical worldviews together with performativity. In other words, knowing and doing are not independent of each other, rather their coupling grounds their close links and that to fully embrace a *maau*, understanding the language used is just as important as in the recitation or the way in which the poem is read out and performed to others.

Articulated further by Soyini Madison (199):

> The theory that gets in my head and sticks—the good parts or the parts relevant to what I must become and do in my life—performs. That this theory performs me is an existential fact. That I choose to perform it is my craft. I perform theory through time, through (un)consciousness, nervousness, and effort. This theory/performance coupling is not an easy assignment. Performance thrills me, theory does not. I would surely lose myself without performance, but I cannot live well without theory. (p. 109)

Although my *maau* below is written in *Lea faka-Tonga*, it is not conceptualised to be performed as a song, chant, or dance—at least not in the way that Helu (2012) has alluded us to. The intention of my *maau* is to captivate *mālie* and *māfana's* charm and presence when seeking to *fakaivia*—ignite Tonga ways of sense-making meaning-making.

> Holo pe ho'o mou me'a
> Pea fakatulou atu
> Kae 'atā mo au
> Ke fai ha talatalanoa
> Fekauaki moe mālie
> Moe mahu'inga 'o e māfana
> Mātanga 'o e maau moe faivá
>
> Laumālie ē

Ma'u ai hoto ivi
Fakakoloa he monū
Tu'umālie ma'u pē
Fofola 'a e ngaahi talā
Ako e mo 'ene faingamālie
Ngāue'aki 'a e poto moe 'ilo

Loloto 'a e Laumālie
Loto to'a
Loto fiemālie
Loto māfana
Loto fakapotopoto
Faka'inasi ma'u pē ia
He 'oku fe'ungamālie ma'u pe
'A e ivi 'o e loto moe laumālie

My *maau* visibilises a meaningful pattern and a rhythmic beat that makes sense to me and connects with the ways I feel inspired and fuelled—through *mālie* and *māfana*—and my embodied (re)presentations of meaning-making and sense-making in the world. Its performative functions can be felt, expressed and translated through recitation and performance. The *maau* above captures and portrays my valuing of the spiritual realm as being a significant aspect of my "being" and "becoming" in the *Moana*. It foregrounds Tongan language and culture expressed through writing and performance through recitation and living (performing, doing) the cultural ideals in my social relations and sense of inter-connections within the *Moana*. For instance, living in a large *kāinga* (extended family) and being part of a Tongan church congregation provides me contexts and situations to exercise and employ *mālie* and *māfana*. Moreover, the *maau* centres the *loto* (soul, heart) as the site that enables the negotiations and sense making to take place. It is the *loto* that allows for the unpacking of the complications yet compromising aspects of the rhythmic entanglement between the knowing and the doing, mediated through one's ontological becoming in the world.

FAIVA: DANCE AS OBSERVED AND FELT PERFORMATIVITY

Many *Faiva*, as cultural dance, is the performance of Tongan language and culture including poetry. *Faiva* is a way in which the body expresses and makes sense of knowledge and learning. The observed and felt performances are rhythmic, negotiated through the *vā*, expressed through *mālie* and *māfana* as emotive conditions and spirit (*laumālie*). The rhythmic ambience or feeling when reciting a poem excites the *loto* (soul or heart) to a state of *māfana*, allowing one to bask in joy and experience feelings of warmth felt within that activates embodied meaning-making through dance, actions and performance. As articulated by Futa Helu, the forms of physical and bodily expression can conjure emotions that appear divine-like in characteristic and behaviour (see Helu, 2011). Almost as though through *maau* (poetry) and *faiva* (dance), our human state is allowed to connect with spiritualities that are not always observable nor evident to the human knowing. Helu expressed well such an experience by articulating the eminence of Tongan dance and its purpose, which is to "enhance[e] natural virtues . . . That is the whole aim of dance. It's to make a human being divine in appearance" (Helu, 2011, n.p.).

Post-colonisation has somewhat diluted the majority of the pre-colonial dance and songs in the *moana*. This has impacted the visibility, presence and accessibility of ancient forms of dance, chants, poems and songs. Although some are still evident in Pacific diasporic communities, the language and descriptions have somewhat evolved and reflect the contexts, names and actions appropriate to today's society. It is also apparent the ways in which gender binary notions like male/female, man/woman and gender diversity have become entangled by societal norms. Although Helu's (2011) description of *maau* and *faiva* as enabling the male/female/human to become divine in appearance, today's society positions gender fluidity as a construct shaped by diverse contexts, groupings and social designations that are not bounded only by biology and sex. *Maau* and *faiva* enables fluid performativities and practices that *fakaivia* (inspire and empower) people, their *loto* (heart, soul), and *fakakaukau* (thoughts).

On youtube is a video posted in 2010 of the late Futa Helu's *fakamalele 'o e tapu*, the cultural practice of lifting all restrictions imposed after his death and burial (see Bender & Beller, 2003; Lātū, 2010). The video highlights the *lali* (wooden drum) placed on top of mats, symbolic of the *fakamalele* practice and its function to advise the village of the *tapu* lifting, enabling family and kin members to engage in singing and dancing. One of the reviewers of the article also highlighted this and the significance of cultural sacrilege and processes associated with the spiritual realm, the world of the unseen, and the world of the seen.

Figure 1. Photo taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16Tq27s4HfA.

Faiva as dance is intimately connected with felt performativity. Helu (2011, 2012) highlight the metaphysics of the seen and the unseen worlds as being deeply connected and the symbolic relevance of time and space constructions. With reference to the *fakamalele 'o e tapu* linked to the late Futa Helu's passing, I am always intrigued with the event because, although funerals are often practiced by Tongans in more conservative ways where families are left to grieve, echoing loss and despair, on that particular lifting however, some alumni of the 'Atenisi Institute paid tribute to their leader by singing "Hala kuo papa", an old yet popular poem and song composed by the late Queen Salote. From the very beginning when the singing started, the lyrics became alive, manifested and embodied through the performance. Listening and receiving the poem through song ignited *mālie* and *māfana* within the *loto*,

particularly when Tongan senior scholar Siosiua Fonuakihehama Lafitani and Helu's daughter also performed the *tulāfale* and *tau'olunga*, highlighting an appreciation of life as not ending after death, but enduring beyond and into the spiritual world (see Figure 1). Their performance captured celebratory engagement of their mentor and father whose legacy is felt and valued by them and many others. Such a performance within a primarily sad event like a funeral is symbolic of the rhythmic entanglement within the *vā* which is often negotiated by the *loto*, *laumālie*, and *'atamai*. Such a performance is embodied, observed and felt.

CONCLUSION

The (re)turn to (re)orient from and through the *loto* utilising *Lea faka-Tonga* continues to be an inspiring adventure. The potentiality of Indigenous Pacific concepts and practices meaningfully (re)positions the mattering of culturally grounded perspectives that are often ignored or marginalised in dominant Western contexts. *Mālie* and *māfana* are regularly captured and portrayed through cultural sources and performativities like the *maau* and *faiva*. *Mālie* and *māfana* are rooted, mediated and made sense of within and through the *loto* (soul), *laumālie* (spirit), and *'atamai* (mind). Embracing and expressing *Lea faka-Tonga* through poetry and *faiva* have highlighted rhythmic entanglement as a necessary meaning making process within the *vā* space of inter-connections.

Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge the reviewers of the article for their sincere guidance.

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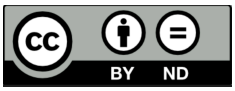

The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 20, No 3, 2021
http://iejcomparative.org

BOOK REVIEW:

Learning and not learning in the heritage language classroom: Engaging Mexican-origin students

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BOOK REVIEW: K. A. Helmer. (2020). *Learning and not learning in the heritage language classroom: Engaging Mexican-origin students*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. ISBN:978-1788927628. 262pp.

Kimberly Adilia Helmer completed the fieldwork for her doctorate by interacting with Mexican-origin Spanish heritage language learners at an emerging charter high school in Arizona. *Learning and not learning in the heritage language classroom: Engaging Mexican-origin students* is her analysis focusing on the first year of the new high school. The book aims to explore reasons Mexican-origin students resist learning in their heritage language. As heritage language researchers, educators, and curriculum developers, we can glean several key points from her narrative.

The ethnography examines Latino/a student resistance to learning the Spanish language by contrasting their engagement in humanities class during the first year of their high school. The book affirms findings of the existing literature in three ways. Firstly, the book provides insights that can assist native Mexican and non-native Mexican heritage language teachers with the pedagogies that acknowledge cultural identity (Usborne & Taylor, 2010) of heritage language learners in a positive and rewarding way. Secondly, Helmer's findings affirm that heritage language teachers should refrain from using teaching materials designed for foreign language learners (Kagan, 2005; Kanno et al., 2008) but conduct purposeful activities designed for heritage language learners, crediting their cultural and linguistic knowledge. Thirdly, teachers should possess containment skills such as patience, perseverance, and the ability to observe, listen, analyze, relate, interpret, mediate, and evaluate (Deardorff, 2009).

The first chapter begins with a captivating account of a camping trip with the high school students and teachers. Helmer then shifts to a more academic pitch and presents the broader social and geographical context to a story about this specific high school. She unveils the school's emphasis on place-based pedagogy and provides the background of charter schools in the US. Chapter 2 explains the ethnographic research context and introduces her focal participants. With a critical ethnography approach, the researcher spent extensive time with the participants in varied contexts and institutional settings. The focus in Chapters 3 and 4 then shifts to the two Spanish language teachers who taught Spanish heritage language learners in the first and second semesters of the school. I, being a non-native teacher of heritage language and a heritage language

researcher, could relate to many aspects of Helmer's reflections. Both chapters guide the heritage language educators on what is to be avoided when teaching the heritage language learners.

Chapter 3 centres on the Spanish heritage language class taught by a qualified, non-Mexican and Anglo female teacher. The teacher had mastery over "academic" Spanish but, due to a lack of cultural sensitivity, unknowingly initiated student resistance. The students perceived that the teacher disrespected their Mexican identities in the *Pachuco* incident. *Pachuco* refers to the young Mexican-American subculture. In this incident, the teacher used this term while introducing language varieties in the class and accidentally addressed one of her students as a *Pachuco*, leading the students to regard the teacher as a linguistic outsider. While narrating this story, Helmer summarizes the challenges of a non-native teacher teaching Spanish to heritage language learners, and explores the psyche of the Mexican immigrants, the history of marginalization, language policies at public schools in America, and the reasons for minority language resistance. In doing so, the author suggests that the study of student resistance to learning the heritage language relates to wider issues, such as the undervaluation of minority languages and the English-only movement in the US that are well beyond the domains of classrooms and schools.

Chapter 4 examines the Spanish heritage language class taught by a novice but native Spanish speaker in the second semester. The students did not show resistance to Spanish speaking, unlike the first semester, but disregarded the teacher's authority due to his lack of teaching expertise and choice of study material. Here, the author identifies other factors affecting heritage language learning, including the adverse reactions that the Mexican-origin individuals experience when encountering Mexicans in Mexico, linguistic insecurity (González, 2001) and linguistic shyness (Krashen, 1998), and further highlights the distinctive differences between heritage language learners and foreign language learners. The author emphasizes that Spanish heritage language learners with their cultural and linguistic knowledge are superior to foreign language learners in a bilingual market. The author argues for concrete and systematic efforts and sound Spanish heritage language pedagogy to promote heritage language acquisition and maintenance. As a reader, we cannot stop contemplating when the author questions:

> One may wonder: Are young mathematicians who can solve algebra problems in the primary grades forced to only solve simple arithmetic? These students are often steered toward gifted and talented programs, but not the student with bilingual potential. Many educators, and the general public, see math ability as an achievement and/or gift, while linguistic ability/potential among minority students is viewed as a barrier and a problem. (p. 87)

Chapter 5 details the activities of the focal Mexican-origin students in the humanities class over an academic year, which was the students' favourite class. Students liked the class teacher's positive qualities, such as being authoritative while respecting the student identity and providing the choice of self-expression in student assignments, all of which contributed to positive student participation. The author is aware that one cannot directly compare the humanities class with the Spanish heritage language class but utilized the natural school set-up where the same cohort of students took the Spanish and humanities class, which enabled her to observe the students in two different contexts.

Helmer then integrates the preceding three chapters and explores a place and people-based pedagogy for heritage language classes. Here, she renders a key message: that heritage language programs should offer curriculum going beyond textbooks. Illustrating family and community-based research projects, the chapter argues for establishing a safe learning environment; and for the mainstream schools officially acknowledging the significance of the heritage language programs. With the symbolic status of heritage language being enhanced, students are less likely to undervalue learning Spanish. A greater awareness of practical heritage language teaching guidelines will positively affect the field of heritage language education and lead to better outcomes.

Chapter 7 describes the time Helmer returned to the high school for a workshop 13 years after her original fieldwork. She compares the now-established organization with her observation of the school's first year. By recapitulating her original research findings, she discusses how the student identity, ideology, and imagination influenced their investment in Spanish over humanities (that is, English and social studies), and argues that the students have conflicting identities, either accepting or giving up their Spanish identities. The students are unable to visualize themselves using standard Spanish in broader contexts since their life experiences are restricted to school and home because of their age, but they could see the value of studying English in their humanities class. Thirteen years later, the author found that the school no longer maintained Spanish heritage language programs. Only Spanish as a foreign language program continued. I would be interested in learning how and why this occurred, and how the process might have been impacted by the maturation process of this charter school.

Drawing on a critical ethnography method, the book's seven chapters are replete with field notes and cover multiple aspects of Mexican-origin students. Helmer primarily used data collected in the form of field notes and interviews. She also conducted interactional discourse analysis. Helmer is a good storyteller, able to maintain a level of reflexivity, which drives the narrative forward dynamically:

> I explored what caused resistance to (heritage) language learning and, at the same time, I wanted to investigate the converse, what caused engagement in learning. I was fortunate to find myself in a research context where naturally occurring class schedules and events allowed me to observe student behavior under a variety of conditions, enabling me to make stronger correlations. (p. 25)

Overall, this critical ethnography is a timely, eloquent and analytically rigorous examination of how the Mexican-origin students resist the Spanish heritage language learning through non-participation. It provides an informative cross-section of resistance and engagement in heritage language learning and demonstrates how the institutional factors in the initial years contributed to student resistance. When an experienced native English speaker with advanced Spanish language skills taught Spanish, the heritage language learners refused to speak Spanish in class because they felt alienated from the non-native teacher. By contrast, with a Spanish heritage teacher, students displayed poor class attendance and disruptive behaviours because the teacher was inexperienced. Incorporating perspectives from social and political issues of the growing Hispanic population in the US, Helmer's rich ethnography provides concrete pedagogical ideas to heritage language teachers.

Resistance in Spanish heritage language learning is the central focus of the book. The original contribution of this book is that it revealed the detailed mechanisms where heritage language learners resist learning the language through an effective ethnographic fieldwork study. This book will interest anyone concerned with heritage language maintenance, administration, teaching, learning, and research.

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The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 20, No 3, 2021
http://iejcomparative.org

BOOK REVIEW:

Effective school librarianship: Successful professional practices from librarians around the world

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BOOK REVIEW: Patrick Lo, Heather Rogers, and Dickson K. W. Choi. (2018). *Effective school librarianship: Successful professional practices from librarians around the world* (2-volume set). New Jersey: Apple Academic Press. ISBN-13:978-1-77188-656-7. 262 pp. and 252 pp.

A key takeaway underpinning stories shared by school librarians worldwide is the value of school libraries, which significantly function as living organisms to support students' learning development. Throughout the last decade and regardless of the geopolitical background, school libraries have faced challenges to preserving their functions and indispensability. Interviews with school librarians highlight perspectives and insights into the actual condition of school libraries and help to establish good strategies for debunking the misconceptions about the role and contributions of libraries within schools. The two-set volume publication, *Effective school librarianship: Successful professional practices from librarians around the world*, tells readers about the importance of school libraries as a learning hub in the 21st century.

Volume one comprises two parts: part one focuses on North and South America, and part two focuses on Europe. Volume two comprises three parts: part one focuses on Africa, which includes the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Nigeria; part two focuses on Asia, which includes Japan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Thailand, Nepal and Vietnam; and part three focuses on Australia, which includes the states of New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland.

Additionally, the volume includes forewords from well-known school librarians whose works and research about school libraries are exemplary, such as Dr Helen Boelens, Daisuke Okada and the late Dr Fadekemi Oyewusi. I have met some of these people at several International Association School Librarianship (IASL) conferences and know and admire them as persistent advocates of school libraries in their countries. It is impressive to see that the book's authors have invited these scholars to contribute to the publication.

The authors outlined a set of questions that encouraged a fruitful and meaningful conversation. Responses from participating librarians were significantly elaborated upon through follow-up questions by the authors, encouraging contributors to detail

locally based initiatives, programs and efforts and thus portray existing situations of school libraries throughout the world

For example, the focus on initiating the "makerspace" movement as part of the school club in Virginia, US, is interesting and provocative, in the sense that this library embodies the innovative and creative skills of being librarians—skills many people don't expect or recognise. "Makerspace" is defined as a collaborative workspace inside a school, library or separate public/private facility for making, learning, exploring and sharing that uses high tech to no tech tools (Makerspace.com, n.d.). The librarian's efforts around makerspaces justify the claim that school libraries are beyond a physical place or book storage facility. The Virginia school librarians' successful work exemplify that school libraries can prepare and empower students in the real world. Similarly, many stories from other librarians reveal the strong commitment of school libraries to expanding and developing their knowledge in the aspect of technology. For instance, a Turkey-based school library facilitates a Digital Citizenship training program that seeks to equip students to become competent digital users. This initiative is a living testimony that libraries operate outside the box and even beyond "usual jobs" often associated with libraries and librarians.

The authors highlighted common problems school librarians face: lack of staff, lack of recognition, lack of opportunities to collaborate, and other challenges such as those defined by geographic location. Several publications (Leslie & Wilson, 2001; Lukenbill, 2002; Shonhe, 2019) have repeatedly cited these challenges, but these publications do not provide a detailed picture of what the challenges mean on the ground. By sharing professional practices and stories deeply embedded in personal lives and actual settings, Lo et al. provide that meaning. For instance, a school librarian in the Philippines specifically identified the current situation of school librarianship in the aspect of local governance. As mandated by law, creating jobs for a school librarian must be initiated by and adopted by the local government. Such a detail provides important background information when exploring the nature of school librarianship in that country. With this book left unpublished, readers would not be able to make sense of the full context of this story, along with the financial constraints that have always become a major setback in school libraries.

Having worked in school libraries in the Middle East for almost six years, I can relate to how school librarians are desperate to be included and treated as part of the faculty team. Some school librarians are not given opportunities by school administrators, principals, and heads of schools to collaborate with other teachers. The narratives provided by school librarians in this book effectively emphasize the shortcomings of this situation that should be addressed and understood in modern societies.

Though providing much valuable information, I think the book could usefully have presented relevant resources at the end of each narrative that might be valuable for addressing challenges within the profession and supporting the role of school librarians. Resources could have included a list of useful websites featuring various platforms, databases, resources, lesson plans, collection developments and selection tools, which would give readers access to a wide and rich information source. Such a resource would be especially beneficial to library professionals who have not been given opportunities

to attend various capacity-building activities in Asia, resulting in a lack of awareness of current practices and trends around school librarianship.

School libraries in the Middle East have diverse and noteworthy professional practices and approaches, particularly in the context of international school librarianship. I have witnessed the commitment of these school library professionals to sharing their stories, practices, and resources with the community. They even organized a set of informal meetings within the region to ensure that their colleagues are well acquainted with the latest trends, developments, issues, and events involving school libraries. However, these accounts were not included in the book. I hope that the authors will consider this work in future publications because the stories in the Middle East are key to developing new perspectives on the development of school libraries.

I am puzzled why some countries (e.g., Turkey, Sweden, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe, and Thailand) were covered twice. A more ideal approach would be to include other countries not included, to provide a more diverse overview when discussing the effective roles of school libraries in the international context.

Overall, this two-set volume book offers unique stories of the school librarianship field that are impactful, relevant and stimulating. The authors successfully outlined a set of questions that revealed a critical understanding of the current situation of school libraries worldwide. The school librarians interviewed for the book have impressive stories that continue to be an inspiration in the field.

I highly recommend the book for scholars and library professionals and for everyone who wants to deeply understand the exciting role of school librarians and their valuable contribution in an era of information overload. More importantly, this book is a source of encouragement to school librarians seeking a deeper sense of worth in the school community. It is a book that deserves to be read and acquired in every single library. I will definitely recommend this book to our public library!

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BOOK REVIEW: Effective School Librarianship: Successful professional practices from librarians around the world.

The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 20, No 3, 2021
http://iejcomparative.org

BOOK REVIEW:

Leadership, community partnerships and schools in the Pacific islands: Implications for quality education

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BOOK REVIEW: J. Dorovolomo and G. I. Lingam (Eds.) (2020). Leadership, community partnerships and schools in the Pacific Islands: Implications for quality education. Springer. ISBN: 978-981-15-6482-6. 187pp.

This edited volume of 13 empirical studies undertaken by 12 Pacific scholars is valuable because it provides insights into critical issues of schooling from the often-neglected perspectives of Pacific island educators. Drawn from the Talanga Seminar series, facilitated by the School of Education at the University of the South Pacific (USP), the collection covers topics and themes of interest to anyone interested in knowing more about the practical day-to-day occurrences and challenges faced by educational administrators, school leaders and teachers in Pacific island countries.

In introducing the volume, the editors set out an all too commonly heard story of the dangers of uncritical "policy transfer" or "policy borrowing" across the Pacific and the need to ensure policies and practices are contextually relevant and appropriate. By bringing a sharp focus on the daily interactions of teachers, school leaders, and their communities, the collection reveals the nuances of what "contextually relevant and appropriate" looks like and involves. In so doing, the volume adds to and complements the growing body of empirical research produced by Pacific scholars for—and relevant to—Pacific educators and policymakers (see, for example, Benson et al., 2002; Dorovolomo et al., 2014; Otunuku et al., 2014; Otunuku et al., 2020).

The research shared in the book addresses critical issues of school leadership, school-community relationships, citizenship education, research, and approaches to improving literacy and numeracy. These issues are currently of great concern to Pacific educators and policymakers, as evidenced, for example, in the priority areas of the *Pacific Regional Framework for Education*.[1] A further important contribution of the volume is its inclusion of country contexts that are relatively neglected in existing literature,

[1] Pacific Regional Framework for Education. Retrieved from https://pacref.org/

namely those of Niue, the Republic of Marshall Islands, and Solomon Islands, and Fiji, where the USP School of Education is located.

A focus on the beliefs and values of school leaders, teachers, and parents runs throughout the book. This responds to the challenge of contextualization by recognizing the central role that values and beliefs play in mediating the success of any educational policy reform or intervention. The collection includes research exploring Early Childhood Education leaders' beliefs about the importance of extending autonomy in their roles to include day-to-day school planning, leadership, and resource coordination (Chapter 12: Fito'o); Fijian secondary teachers' approaches to teaching maths using pure (absolutist) or applied (fallibilist) methods derived from their own past experiences or personal biases (Chapter 7: Dayal and Lingam); and Solomon Islands parents' views on positive relationship building and effective communications with teachers and school leaders to promote transparency in leadership and management of school resources (Chapter 4: Wairiu). These Chapters are examples of the rich insights into day-to-day schooling experiences, thus demonstrating the value of empirical, context-specific research.

School leadership is another focus in the volume. In Chapter 2, Lingam and Lingam explore teachers' perspectives on their school leaders in Niue, while in Chapter 3, Lingam, Dayal, and Lingam explore school improvement planning among Marshall Islands school leaders. Both chapters demonstrate the critical importance of school leaders in managing change.

A particular value of the volume is the inclusion of under-researched topics in the region. In Chapter 5, Fito'o and Dorovolomo discuss two practical studies on citizenship education and recommend strengthening the human rights, civic education, and social citizenship components within the national social science and humanities curriculum of Solomon Islands schools. Totaram, Raghuwaiya, Yee Chief, and Jokhan's chapter (Chapter 11) on the use of technology-enhanced learning for numeracy in Fijian primary schools provides a basis upon which further studies can build to develop a stronger evidence base for the efficacy of digital technologies in Pacific classrooms. In Chapter 9, Varani-Norton eloquently argues the need for Fijian schools to move away from teacher-centred classrooms and exam-oriented curriculums into more learner-centred classrooms and school environments. Dorovolomo's research (Chapter 8) on gender differences in play in primary school playgrounds in Fiji offers a particularly novel empirical exploration of children's interactions in schooling settings, complementing the focus on teachers and leaders.

As noted by the editors, the volume also offers value to students of education and research in the region by demonstrating a range of methodological approaches, which are explained in accessible ways. There were, however, several dimensions of the contributions that, if given greater attention, would have further enhanced the value of the collection. We noted the collection's relative absence of research using Pacific theorization and research methodologies (for a recent review of such, see Sanga & Reynolds, 2017) and, to a lesser extent, citations of existing Pacific scholarship. While commending the volume's embrace of the value of "learning across boundaries" of North and South (p. 182), it could have more fully engaged with Pacific theorizations and methodologies for empirical research on schooling going forward. As noted above,

the small-scale nature of these studies, many of which involved a sample of just one or several school settings, offers rich insights into specific contexts that are valuable in and of themselves, but there is an unnecessary attempt in several of the chapters to claim generalizable findings or to reference findings against those from other quite distinct country contexts. While we agree with the potential for larger-scale studies to broaden the evidence base offered by these studies, we encourage readers to celebrate the value of small-sample qualitative research as presented in this volume. Such small-scale studies bring to the fore the sometimes complex yet unique aspects of schooling and teaching in Pacific schools.

Finally, the collaborative nature of the development of this book is important to acknowledge—emerging as it did from a seminar series utilizing the Tongan methodology of *talanga,* or purposeful dialogue—to generate ongoing, collaborative, and respectful critical dialogue amongst staff and students of the School of Education. In this regard, the book contributes to a growing body of literature on centring Pacific oralities and dialogic methods as part of academic deliberation (Fa'avae & Fonua, 2021; Fonua, 2020; Sanga et al, 2021). It also offers a relatively unique example of how a method such as *talanga* can be used to develop, refine, and feed into academic publications. We look forward to future publications that might further explore this process and authors' personal experiences and reflections on it. At a time when the international scholarly community is facing multiple demands that are limiting opportunities for open, collaborative engagement, there is much to be commended on committing time to this approach, and much to be learnt from the authors' experiences that are of value to those in the region and beyond.

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