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Editorial: Strengthening Educational Relationships in Oceania and Beyond

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In 1983 the Australia New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society (ANZCIES) became the second "regional member" of the World Congress of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), the only member society of WCCES's fifth, and by far least populated, region of Oceania. As defined by United Nations agencies and many other international and regional bodies, the region of Oceania includes the 'developed' states of Australia and New Zealand, the relatively large 'developing' state of Papua New Guinea, and the many small 'developing' island states (SIDS) and territories located across the Pacific basin. These 22 Pacific Island Countries (PICs) represent a large proportion of the world's smallest states most of which are categorised according to various indexes such as 'least developed', 'fragile', 'vulnerable' etcetera. Per capita, PNG and the PICS make up the world's most aid-dependent (sub) region.

Late in 2014, ANZCIES members voted strongly in favour of a name change for their regional society, to one more representative of the region within which the society exists, and more inclusive of educationists from throughout Oceania, particularly those from PICs. Thus ANZCIES became OCIES, reflecting the wish of many members to revitalise their society by encompassing the diversity of contexts, issues, interests and perspectives represented in Oceania. A particular concern was to both widen participation in and add depth to debates and dialogue about how Comparative and International Education (CIE), a research area within which many educationists identify as 'academic-practitioners', can contribute theoretically and practically to education for sustainable development in the post-2015 era. The north/south relationship between Australia/New Zealand and PNG/PICs, particularly as exemplified through educational aid, was a key focus. Another aim was to explore the means of developing CIE's potential to enhance educational transformation in the region while contributing to a new Oceanic regionalism.

The title of this Special Issue, *Strengthening Educational Relationships in Oceania and Beyond*, is underpinned by the regional vision offered by the late Tongan anthropologist, Dr Epeli Hau'ofa, as an alternative to the prevalent regional perspective at the time, "the economistic and geographic determinist view" (1993:6) which he saw as maintaining the power relations of colonial times between Pacific Rim 'developed' countries and the small island 'developing' states and territories within the Pacific Basin. Hau'ofa's "New Oceania" focused on the Pacific Ocean as a shared post-colonial space for both the revitalisation of the pre-colonial interconnectedness of Pacific peoples and the development of extensive and expansive new connections with Pacific Rim countries, particularly Australia and New Zealand, of "a vibrant and much enlarged world of social networks that criss-cross the ocean …" (1998:391).

The five articles in this special issue draw on papers presented –as keynote addresses or as panel contributions - at the OCIES 2015 (November 3-6) conference held in the small Pacific state of Vanuatu, the first regional CIE conference to be held in a location other than Australia or New Zealand. They also informed a further exposure for most authors by way of a panel presentation at the 2016 World Congress of Comparative Education Societies in Beijing (July

21-26) which aligned with the general theme of the conference, *Dialectics of Education: Comparative Perspectives,* in addressing the need to explore the dialectics through which CIE can strengthen its work in Oceania. The decision to do so through the thematic strand *Modernity and Tradition* was because of the extent to which Pacific cultures are shaped by traditions that effectively predate colonisation. Although increasingly influenced by processes of globalisation, including global development agendas, 'traditional' political and economic structures, embedded within ethics of redistribution, reciprocity and inclusiveness, to varying degrees still characterise Pacific cultures. The extent to which these articulate with 'modern' institutions such as education cannot be ignored in the pursuit of sustainable education development.

Hau'ofa's ocean-centric approach attributed the development and survival of the complexity of societies which make up the most culturally and ecologically diverse region in the world to the Pacific Ocean which he saw as a unifying mechanism for the establishment, maintenance and expansion of social relationships across historical time and regional space. Thus his spatial-temporal analysis in which the natural environment and society condition and shape each other, presented Oceania as a *relational space.* It is this broad theme, of how we can more effectively engage in dialogue and collaborative research and all other educational relationships, that informs this collection.

Writing directly to the broad theme, Kabini Sanga explores possible opportunities for renewed neighbourliness in aid relationships. His focus on educational aid relationships is concerned particularly with the *forms* of aid. He argues that, in the existing literature, forms of aid giving and receiving remain largely theoretical and heavily reliant on donor views. He offers an alternative perspective premised on the belief that it is people who give life to form; thus it focuses on form at the people level. He adopts a storytelling approach as a genre that enables the complexities of form at the people level to be understood. Sanga's article calls for a new Oceania *wantok* system—an animation of neighbourliness which involves living beyond private interests, positions, and passions. He poses challenges for such an Oceanic education aid community maintaining that, if aid relationships are to achieve renewed neighbourliness, our aid must involve aid givers entering into and making full effort to understand the cultures they are seeking to reach; that "… our aid and life need to be open to that which is outside. Our relationships within Oceania must draw us to unfamiliar, uncomfortable places".

Alex McCormick, author of our second article, provides a rigorously researched and richly contextualised account of education policy processes in Vanuatu. In mapping the multi-level roles that education and development policy actors have been playing in relation to the 'post-2015' agendas and processes that contributed to creating the sustainable development goals, she explores the intersections between global and local. The relevance and implications of globalised processes for education and development futures are interrogated through lenses of decolonising histories, language use, and dynamic geo-political regional power relations. McCormick argues that the decolonising discourses of self-reliance that gained traction in national independence movements have maintained emphasis in Vanuatu civil society and government approaches to national education and development policy. This contention is supported by her recognition of dynamic, indigenous *kastom* beliefs and practices being central to most aspects of life for most ni-Vanuatu people, and the foundation for the revitalisation of the 'traditional economy' and 'alternative' visions of development. Her investigation of multiple, inter-relating actors and contexts for education policy formation processes builds on methodological and conceptual approaches of critical discourse analysis, multi-level policy exchange and transfer, and post-colonial theoretical approaches.

In our next article, Seu'ula Johansson-Fua sets out to address the relative absence of Pacific researcher voices within the field of comparative and international education, internationally,

and regionally. She picks up on one of the key themes of our first OCIES conference and of this special issue—that of developing CIE's potential to enhance educational transformation in Oceania—and explores the various spaces and possibilities for Oceanic education researchers, both Pacific and non-Pacific, to engage in collaborative research. Drawing on Hau'ofa's Oceanic philosophy, Johansson-Fua maintains that the role of the Oceanic researcher is to define relevant research approaches, methodologies, and ethical protocols so that they may confidently translate, contextualise and make sense of both 'the ocean within us'—Pacific cultures, traditional knowledge systems and trusted traditional processes, and 'the ocean around us'—the global agendas for education development. She draws on Bhabha's theory of hybridity to suggest a third space, *Motutapu*, a pan-Pacific term referring to "a place of rejuvenation, a sanctuary; a place to launch new journeys". Johansson-Fua concludes by positing the hybrid *Motutapu* as a space in which Oceanic researchers can explore the dialogical and relational aspects of comparative and international education within our regional context.

Although Rebecca Spratt's article examines the same focus of aid relationships within the context of Solomon Islands as our first article by Sanga, hers follows a very different path. Motivated by her own experience as an aid worker, the primary aim of the research she undertook was to explore the ways in which professional subjectivity is influenced by, and influences, aid relationships in Solomon Islands, the wider context of which is positioned as an integral part of the research process itself. Spratt's investigation of the professional subjectivities of a group of public servants working for the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, employed ethnographic interviews to explore how the research participants interpreted the roles and labels that aid discourse ascribed to them, and how they perceived and experienced relationships within the heavily aid-ed context of Solomon Islands. The research findings demonstrate the complex, dynamic and multi-faceted nature of aid relationships and subjectivities, and that context and history not only matter but are created and re-created in and through discourse and relationships. Spratt concludes, rightly, that her findings offer a potential means for strengthening education aid relationships across Oceania and beyond.

Our fifth article, by Christine Fox, poses challenges for comparative and international education that take us well beyond our own region. Asserting that many of today's education systems reflect socially and economically divisive ideologies, hostile to equitable change, she argues that comparative and international education theorists and practitioners can play a crucial role in critiquing, through the lens of critical postcolonial awareness, such socio-political constructions of society and education. Bringing it back to Oceania, a region containing both large economies such as Australia and small Pacific island states, she asks Oceanic educators how they can research actively and engage in a dialogue that draws upon the strengths of current innovation, of increased access to global communication, and the strengths of scholarly theoretical deliberation? She then sets out a most persuasive argument for re-imagining our neighbourhood and 'unleashing our global postcolonial consciousness'. Drawing on postcolonial theories and ways of viewing our world, Fox makes the conceptual connections required to build a framework through which educationists can effect change within an intercultural, ethical, and actionable space. As she concludes, "There is today a move from critiquing to raising a storm of awareness, to unleashing a force for social change based on a firm consciousness of postcolonial ways of knowing".

The five articles making up this Special Issue respond to OCIES's vision, thus reflecting the wish of members to revitalise their society by encompassing the diversity of contexts, issues, interests and perspectives represented in Oceania. They also uphold, explicitly or implicitly, many aspects of CIE which have long been highlighted as demonstrating its effectiveness as a research area. Collectively the issue reflects the broadly defined notion of 'comparison', the

interdisciplinarity and theoretical-methodological eclecticism promoted in much of the CIE literature. As stated earlier in this editorial, the rationale for moving from ANZCIES to OCIES identified such features as enabling the openness to innovative CIE research approaches and new collaborative research relationships, required to strengthen educational interconnectedness within the relational space of Oceania. Also addressed are the long espoused CIE concerns for culture and context, of equity and social justice.

Finally and most importantly, we again offer our deep appreciation to those at the University of the South Pacific's Emalus Campus in Port Vila and Vanuatu's Ministry of Education and Training, and all others who contributed to the 2015 OCIES conference at which the ideas and thoughts expressed in this issue were first aired. Tagiu tumas!

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Eve Coxon is an Associate-Professor in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Auckland where she has worked since the late 1980s. During her time at the University of Auckland she also has held senior positions in the Centres for Pacific Studies and Development Studies. Her experience over the past almost 30 years as researcher and consultant in many 'developing' countries in Oceania and beyond reflects this interdisciplinary approach. Her work on 'education and development' in the Pacific and in 'fragile' and 'vulnerable' states, focuses on how education aid can enhance sustainable and equitable education development. She was founding Director and is now co-Director of the Research Unit in Pacific and International Education (RUPIE). She is currently President of OCIES.

SANGA, KABINI

Kabini Sanga, a Solomon Islander, is an educator with over three decades of leadership experience in multiple jurisdictions. Although he lives in Aotearoa New Zealand where he is an Associate Professor of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, Kabini is a clan leader of his Gula'alaa people of East Mala'ita, Solomon Islands. He received his schooling in Solomon Islands, his undergraduate education at University of the South Pacific and postgraduate degrees in Educational Administration in Canada. Kabini's research interests are in leadership, educational policy, international education, development education, governance of higher education and indigenous research. He is a mentor who is active in growing a new generation of Pacific leaders, and has been a consultant for Solomon Islands government and international aid agencies over a number of years.

MCCORMICK, ALEXANDRA

Alex McCormick is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney. Alex teaches programmes in comparative and international education and sociology of education, and on the Masters of Development Studies in Anthropology. She has a Master of International Studies, and previously taught in schools in China and Japan. Alex's doctoral research in six Southeast Asian and Pacific island nations provided a multi-scalar analysis of the formation, maintenance and transmission of EFA norms at global, regional, sub-regional and national levels. Recent research examining education policy processes for 'post-2015' in Melanesian countries draws on methodological and conceptual approaches of critical discourse analysis, multi-level policy exchange and transfer, and post-colonial theoretical approaches.

JOHANSSON-FUA, SEU'ULA

Seu'ula Johansson-Fua is the Director of the Institute of Education at the University of the South Pacific. Schooled in Tonga, Seu'ula continued her education in New Zealand where she received her undergraduate degrees. She was a Commonwealth scholar and received an M.A and Ph.D. in Educational Administration from the Ontario Institute of Education at the University of Toronto. Her research interests include educational leadership, management, organizational systems and structures, policy analysis and strategic planning. Seu'ula has undertaken research and training in Tonga, Tuvalu, Samoa, Cook Islands, Palau, Nauru, Fiji and Solomon Islands. Notable work includes Sustainable Livelihood and Education studies with Tongan and Nauruan teachers, the findings of which were translated into curriculum materials.

SPRATT, REBECCA

Rebecca Spratt has 15 years' experience working and carrying our research in international aid in the Pacific region, with a specialist focus in education aid. Rebecca has a BA in Anthropology and BSc in Psychology from Victoria University of Wellington and completed her Masters in International Development Studies at the University of Auckland. Rebecca worked for the New Zealand Aid programme for 10 years, including over three years' posted in Solomon Islands. She has fulfilled policy and research roles with several education-focused international non-governmental organisations, and is currently programme manager for the Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme operating in Cook Islands, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

FOX, CHRISTINE

Christine Fox, formerly at the University of Wollongong**,** has researched, taught, published and undertaken international consultancies over a number of years, particularly in the Asia-Pacific area. Her consultancy and published academic work relate to teacher education and curriculum reform, comparative and international education, critical and postcolonial theory, intercultural and feminist perspectives, and qualitative and narrative methodologies. Over the years, each of these fields has become interwoven around the fabric of human rights and social justice. Christine was twice President of ANZCIES, was a Vice-President of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), and is past Secretary-General of the WCCES (2005-2012). Christine is an active volunteer for Amnesty International Australia and is currently engaged in research into education in Tanzania.

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What if *form* was the aid? Possible opportunities for renewed neighbourliness in aid relationships

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For Pacific Islands' peoples, relationships are of enduring importance. Yet, in spite of decades of aid giving and receiving, relationships in Pacific aid communities have predominantly been indifferent. In an era of global challenges, a new Oceania Education aid community is called to journey together to the common good through relational generosity. This call is based on the premise that people relationships constitute the glue that binds communities. The paper offers for consideration, three opportunities for the Oceania Education aid community to explore.

Keywords: aid relationships, form, modality, partnerships, neighbourliness, Oceania

INTRODUCTION

Drawing on the broad theme of strengthening relationships, this paper focuses on educational aid relationships and particularly on the *forms* of aid. After briefly surveying what is typically meant when aid forms are referred to, it identifies key areas of debate and interest within the literature on aid modality. It maintains that within these key areas, modality is seen as largely theoretical. Also argued is that the associated literature relies heavily on donors' views as against recipients' experiences. Because of the belief that it is people who give life to *form*, however, this paper offers an alternative perspective by focusing on *form* at the people level. Within this focus, the paper closely examines aid givers as opposed to the receivers of aid. Adopting a storytelling approach as a genre that enables the complexities of form at the people level to be lived with, the remainder of the paper is organized into three parts: brief observations about form as aid at the micro level; a good news story to illustrate that within constraining environments we can create hope-filling visions; and opportunities for a new Oceania Education community to consider.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF AID MODALITY

When talking about *form* we would typically think about such aid forms as core budget (Swedish International Development Agency [hereafter, SIDA], 2006), debt relief, co-financing, trust funds, grant funding, Sector Wide Approach (Foster and Fozzard, 2000), the project (Foster and Leavy, 2001), the consultant or the Technical Assistance (NZAID, 2008), and so on. As forms of aid, these instruments have received broad scrutiny in the global literature over recent decades. Some authors (Burnside and Dollar, 2000; Easterly, 2003; Paul and Vandeninden, 2012) have pointed out the ineffectiveness of aid forms. Others (Duflo and Kremer, 2008; Banerjee, Duflo, Cole and Linden, 2007) have argued in favour of positive effects of aid forms. In-between these quite polarised positions, others (Cordella and

Dell'Ariccia, 2007; Jelovac and Vandeninden, 2014) have pointed out the terms under which certain aid forms are effective or ineffective. In other words, the debate on aid modality and effectiveness is complex, general, inconclusive, and continuing.

A closer examination of the literature on aid modality shows five key areas of interest. First, aid modality is value-laden, hence political (Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation [hereafter, SADE], 2007). Within any aid approach are different actors, all with their different objectives and preferred ways of working. As well, according to McGillivary (2003), where donors have historical relationships with recipients, these often influence the modality used. Moreover, modality is context-, path-, and sector-dependent (SADE, 2007), and is readily influenced by incentives (Gibson, Andersson, Ostrom and Shivakamar, 2005). The political nature of modality is further enhanced by the absorptive capacities (Rose, 2009) of both donors and recipients.

Second, aid modality is donor-driven. According to the *The Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness* (High Level Forum, 2005), while the rhetoric is that partner countries determine the preferred aid forms, the reality is that donors select the forms of aid. In agreement, Hirst (2005) noted that this is so because of donor agendas and preferences. As well, donors set modality decisions because they are influenced by international declarations such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2005 and, more recently, the Global Monitoring Framework (Global Partnership, 2013). Further, donor choice of modality is also determined by policy guidelines as with NZAID (NZAID, 2008) and AUSAID (Hirst, 2005).

Third, aid modality is characterised in a number of ways. According to Foster and Leavy (2001), modality is described by recipient obligations in terms of conditionality, earmarking, and accountability; thereby placing General Budget Support at one end and projects through Non-Government Organizations at another. In another typology, NZAID (2008) used three categories: higher order modalities, contestable modalities, and project modalities; with the clear view that higher order modalities such as pooled funds, sector support, and strategic partnerships were preferred. In a final example, Martens (2004) categorises modalities into a complex web of hierarchical relationships between principals and agents as actors. In this categorisation, one party (principal) gives instructions to another party (agents). At the next level down, the agent becomes a principal; giving further instructions to other agents.

Fourth, aid modality is linked to a relational framework within which a system of incentives exists. In the Swedish Development Agency for instance, a formal decision-making structure and procedures govern aid modality. According to SADE (2007), within the Swedish partnership framework, multiple policy actors such as the parliament, government departments, agencies, civil society, and private sector partners, exist and exert influence on modality. As stated, it is the principal-agent relationships which are at play within such a setting. From an incentive perspective, the interactions and exertions of influence take place at the systemic, organisational, and individual levels (SADE, 2007). It is at the individual level that moral hazards or hidden action (Martens, 2002; Ostrom, E,. Gibson, C,. Shivakamar, S. and Andersson, K., 2002) potentially exist.

Fifth, from the mid-2000s there has been a shift in aid modalities which has been heavily driven by technocratic and bureaucratic ideological changes. Many authors (for example, Holvoet, 2010; Jelovac and Vandeninden, 2014) have observed that donors have shifted from project aid to budget support. Particularly in multilateral aid as compared to bilateral aid, this shift of modality has been more noticeable (Clist, Isopi, Morrissey, 2012). A counter view to this has been expressed by Hirst (2005) who noted that the supposed change is more about donors relating to each other rather than any fundamental aid form transformation.

From this brief overview of the modality literature, it is obvious that aid form is not seen as the aid; rather it is the means by which donors offer and recipients receive aid. As well, form is seen as systemic, structural, organisational, and about physical arrangements and activities, a view which emphasises the 'bricks' in a 'bricks and mortar' sense. An obvious effect of this privileging is that the level of relationships—between people—is neglected. The literature also shows that form is named, administered, evaluated, and changed by donors; reinforcing the power relationships entailed in the 'bricks' conceptualisations of form. Finally, according to Killick (2004) the literature on modality is largely theoretical and relies heavily on donors' views as against recipients' experiences.

FOCUS, CAVEATS, DEFINITIONS, POSITIONING, STRUCTURE

Given the above theoretical-conceptual landscape, this paper offers an alternative perspective premised on the belief that it is people who give life to form; thus it focuses on form at the people level. Within this focus, the paper closely examines aid givers as opposed to the receivers of aid. Despite this focus on aid givers, my concluding observations are intended for both givers and receivers of aid. Throughout the paper, I use the plurals *we* and *our* to acknowledge that—as a New Zealand tax payer (therefore a contributor to the official New Zealand aid programme) and an active donor consultant and Technical Assistant (TA)—I see myself as part of the donor community. My observations in this paper are based on insights from my three decades of being an actor in multiple roles and jurisdictions within the aid industry. I use a storytelling approach as this genre permits us to live with the complexities of form at the people level without the need for quick resolutions, premature disbandment, or disengagement with each other.

As a backdrop to this *tok stori* (*talanoa*, conversation), I concur with others (such as Bruggemann, 2010) that Oceania is not exempted from the global crisis of the common good facing humanity. In the Pacific region, this crisis is evidenced by sparseness (of health services, the high costs of living, etc.), scarcity (of text-books and teachers in schools), and a culture of anxiety. Some would say Pacific peoples, like those elsewhere, are living a wilderness existence where powerful forces are working against the common good of solidarity and common destiny. Against such a backdrop, my basic message is a call for a new neighbourliness—a new Oceania *wantok* system—one which invites all of us to reach beyond ourselves, beyond our private interests, and beyond our sectarian positions and passions.

What follows in this paper is organized into three parts: first, I make brief observations about form as aid at the micro level; second, I share a good news story to illustrate that within constraining environments we can create hope-filling visions; and third, I conclude with three opportunities for a new Oceania Education aid community to consider.

MICRO-LEVEL OBSERVATIONS OF AID AS FORM

"The form of our aid is itself aid… for form itself is an act of power" (source unknown)

In elaborating on the quote above, I make four observations on the modus operandi of our aid-giving to Pacific Islands countries. The first is that our modus operandi assumes that we (givers of aid) have embedded within our aid policy a saviour-mentality message which we must get across to the recipients of our aid. From Wellington or Canberra, we design consultation visits or environment scanning studies to be undertaken in our aid recipient countries. These study

visits are premised on our initiated policy messages on varied topics such as literacy, outcomes-based curriculum, school leadership, and/or diabetes or smoking; or as policy approaches such as SWAps, whole-of-government, and other modality rhetoric. We confidently legitimise these policy messages as underpinned by best practice, evidence-based research, progressive development, and/or good governance. Rarely are the policy messages initiated or specifically requested by our recipient countries.

Further to the above, I note that we (aid givers) are the conveyors of the message "we are your saviours. You (aid receivers) depend on us and on our help." As consultants, we are the drivers of aid form (Foster and Leavy, 2001). Typically, we express such a message through our requests for appointments with aid recipient country officials. We set out travel dates which are suitable for us. We request for meeting times based on our schedules. At times, we might even arrive in-country on a Saturday and request our local counterparts for a briefing meeting on a Sunday, disregarding that in the Pacific Islands, islanders do not 'work' on Sundays. Further, we express such a message in the questions we pose to the recipients of aid. We ask: Would your school benefit from this and that resource? Will your department need such and such capacity support? Do you need a TA for this or that project? Of course, to such questions, the only answer is, "yes." Moreover, we also express such a message in the terms of the Memorandum of Understandings that we draft and sign with our aid recipients. Consistently, such agreements are based on our laws; their conditions are always to protect us, and their requirements are based on our conventions and practices. Finally, our reporting, monitoring, and accountability systems are entirely self-serving and donor-centric (Tilley and Tavakoli, 2012). In other words, they are off-budget (Dijkstra, 2013). We (aid givers) commission the reports (SADE, 2007). We determine the *what* and *how* of the reporting. We ascertain the accountability terms and criteria (OECD/DAC, 2005) and the value propositions (NZAID, 2008).

My third observation is that our modus operandi privileges and prioritises speaking over listening, typified at the systems level by the dominance of donor voices in the literature on modality (Tilley and Tavakoli, 2012). In doing so, we are telling people (aid recipients) the solutions to their problems. Few people like being told. Few people delight in being treated as if they had nothing or little to contribute. Our (aid givers) attempts at listening (to allow their conversations) are often artificial and slightly contrived. We often show little desire to genuinely listen to the other, perhaps because we believe we have little to learn from the other. It is no wonder that our TA advice (in the form of reports) is, as a visit to any Pacific Ministry of Education storage room will show, gathering dust in aid recipients' offices.

My fourth observation on our modus operandi is that it emphasises clutter over people relationships. We emphasise activities. We call for meetings wherein we talk. We speak about outputs, outcomes, and results. The way we work, monitor, and report our work involves much clutter. We work hierarchically with our aid recipients.

Such aid is superficial because it works against the common good. Fundamentally, aid in its current form is based on assumptions of scarcity and a culture of anxiety. At the very least, if it is to achieve renewed neighbourliness, our aid must involve our entering into the cultures we are seeking to reach. It must involve our full effort to understand these cultures. Those who have experienced this aid form will tell us that such aid involves creating space within ourselves for the other.

A GOOD NEWS STORY

Globally, the project is the least favoured form of aid (SIDA, 2007). The reasons for this are well-documented. Yet in many development agencies, including AusAID and the New Zealand Aid Programme, the project is the most used form (Hirst, 2005; SADE, 2007; Dijkstra, 2011). A further perplexity is that as a strategy for leader development within a project, the workshop is the least favoured approach. The workshop is deemed ineffective for leadership development. Yet, the workshop is the principal approach used in the Solomon Islands school leadership programme; a project of the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education which is administered by the Institute of Education of the University of the South Pacific.

During the first year of programme delivery, teams of two consultants were sent out to run five-day workshops in 16 sites throughout the country. At the end of each workshop, in my capacity as the programme's strategic team leader, I would receive the post-workshop participant evaluation reports. A consistent message in the site reports was that participants wanted their paired consultants to return for the next workshop. For the next round of workshops, I changed the membership of teams. In this way, none of the earlier pairs of consultants were on a team together. Even so, the consistent message from the site reports remained unchanged: workshop participants wanted their pair of consultant trainers to return. "What is going on?" I asked myself. Solomon Islanders do not ask for project consultants to return as trainers! More so, as one who is familiar with the overwhelming opinions in the theoretical literature against the project and the workshop, I was surprised to see the consistent participant feedback from different sites over a period of a year. I asked myself: "What is this 'good' in a workshop strategy and within a project, the least favoured of aid forms?"

To answer the questions posed above, let me take you to East Mala'ita, Solomon Islands. Growing up on a small island in East Mala'ita in the 1960s and 70s, I had seen many young men leaving the village for Honiara or to the coconut plantations in Western Solomons in search of paid employment. As a young man said goodbye, often he'd promise an aunt or a mother, "Once I've earned money I'll purchase and send you a bush knife". Or as a young man stepped onto a dingy, in parting from an uncle or a father, the young man would say, "I'll send you money for the children's school fees". Or, he'd promise to send his uncle an axe. To such promises, the adults would typically respond, in true Gula'alā wisdom, *moudi*! In my growing up years, I had witnessed many village mothers, aunties, fathers, and uncles disappointed because their young adults had failed to keep their promises. Often this disappointment was eased only by their wisdom as reflected in their responses of *moudi*. What is *moudi*? Briefly, to the Gula'alā people of East Malai'ita, the concept of *moudi* refers to having a willing heart, to having a heart to help or a heart to serve.

To return to the good news story of the Solomon Islands School leadership programme, it is true that there were a number of variables explaining the credibility of the consultant teams. Chief among these reasons is that each consultant is seen as *moudi* — having a helping and serving heart.

POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES

What opportunities might be gleaned from this good news experience of aid relationships?

Family: interdependence, woven lives, a rich tapestry

People of Oceania might consider a view which assumes that our lives have been and are woven together. This means that in Vanuatu, Tanna people cannot dismiss *man* Efate. Mainstream Australia must not think of Aborigional Australia as less gifted, minimally able or not having much to teach us. Mala'ita bigmen must not mindlessly assert our morality at the cost of dignity, justice, and compassion for women, children, and the weaker members of our communities. The Samoan *matai* (chief) or the Tongan cultural elite must not trivialise the dignity, contribution, and potential of the New Zealand/Australian-born, the part-other, and the diasporic Polynesian youth.

The point? We, peoples of Oceania, within our villages, on our islands, in our nation states, and our region, are family. In Samoan, we are *aiga* (family). To Tongans we are *kainga* (family). We are not just partners in development or colleagues in a college of professionals. We are *wanefuta* (relatives, as we say in Gula'alā). As family, we are travelling in the same *vaka* or canoe. Our lives are woven together.

The purpose (and challenge) of woven lives is to produce a rich tapestry of human experience; dignifying each one of our members, uplifting our human spirits to love as well as to cry with each other, and compelling us to give of ourselves in compassion, in our time. Such a view of woven lives requires a different model of exchange and of relationships. Such a model does not involve matching of gifts, comparing of abilities, blaming or abusing each other, or reducing human dignity.

Hospitality

In a relational sense, aid is fundamentally an act of hospitality, and of generosity. Supposing we strip away the media hype, the formal aid policies, the politics, the conditionality—and if we take down the signboards or we remove the name tags (donor partner, consultant, advisor, expert, facilitator etcetera), what are we left with? What remains is people giving to and receiving from each other. We are left with people being neighbourly to each other.

Seen as an act of generosity, aid is fundamentally risky. Recently, I was on the plane from Honiara to Brisbane and enjoyed an engaging conversation with two young people: an Australian Youth Programme participant who was returning home following a year's assignment in the Solomon Islands, and a New Zealand recent graduate on assignment with the Solomon Islands Civil Society. Both young people spoke passionately with me about their Solomon Islands experiences. They shared their stories about village life. They spoke with me about ideas which I was familiar with. One talked about daily-life stories involving members of my Solomon Islands family. This young person even addressed me in the Mala'ita language of my family members. In summary, both young people spoke about how much their lives had been challenged and changed by their Solomon Islands experiences. At that moment, my views too were changed by that brief encounter: I was beginning to appreciate the two young people as family.

What is the point of this story? Aid givers do not survive their mission intact. Like these young people, aid givers are changed by their missions. This is because generosity is a gracious space-giving, requiring giving up of oneself for others. Understood this way, aid giving is challenging. Generosity is against-the-grain. It calls for a resolution. Are we prepared to be gracious in our space-giving in our aid relationships?

To help us in our further thinking about our aid relationships, might it be that we (aid givers) are changed by our encounters with aid recipients? Might it be that the flow of transformation

is not one-way? Might it be that we also discover 'gifts' and or contributions from the experiences of the other?

Middle ground: living on the edge by seizing the middle ground

The Oceania Education aid community must not remain a club; secure in its self-referential notions of credibility. Our education community must be open to the outside. Being so allows us to be more easily drawn to unfamiliar and uncomfortable places. Only in such places will life be experienced in tension; where we are secure and yet are vulnerable. This is a tough call, particularly in a world and during an era of overwhelming challenges. But this is also a call of opportunity. Available for seizing is the opportunity for an aid community which fully engages in its time but is not fully accepted, welcomed, or settled in its world.

As an illustration, let me talk about the *katukatu* (a bait fish) and the *mamula* (trevally). The *katukatu* is a territorial school of fish that can be found near the beach in tropical climates. In the order of sea world survival, the *katukatu* makes good lunch for the *mamula*. So where there are *katukatu*, there are always *mamula* lurking around.

Growing up on an island, I have often watched a *mamula* coming beneath a school of *katukatu*. Mamula strategy is simple. Dive beneath the school of *katukatu*. Shoot up. Scatter the *katukatu*. One or two bait fish will wander off. Zero in on the wandered *katukatu*. Lunch. This same strategy, however, has a more positive effect on the school of *katukatu*. Whenever the school of *katukatu* senses the presence of *mamula*, the school of fish always huddles together, thereby settling into a more tight-knit community; making it harder for *mamula* attacks.

The point? The lesson of this fishing *tok piksa* (imagery) is to invite the Oceania Education aid community to be a disruptive presence in our time and in our region of the world. Like the *mamula*, it may be that we are unsettling the settled yet also settling the unsettled.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As stated, the forms of our aid giving and receiving remain theoretical and are heavily reliant on donor views. The experienced reality in Pacific Islands settings, however, is one marked by sparseness, scarcity, and anxiety wherein powerful forces against the common good seem prevalent. To counter these 'enemies' of the common good, I am calling for a new Oceania *wantok* system—an animation of neighbourliness which involves living beyond private interests, positions, and passions. Towards this call, the new Oceania Education aid community is asked: In our aid giving, are we willing to be truly changed by our encounters? Or are we merely recruiting more people to our ways of seeing the world (so we can feel secure in a larger population of people like us)? Rather intrusive and disturbing questions indeed. But what is at stake— surviving the onslaught on the common good—demands more from this new generation aid community. For us, our aid and life need to be open to that which is outside. Our relationships within Oceania must draw us to unfamiliar, uncomfortable places; the hinterlands and alien territories of our human existence and experiences. Such places are the opportunities wherein life is lived on the threshold; life is experienced in tension where we are known but yet unknown.

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Vanuatu Education Policy post-2015: 'alternative', decolonising processes for 'development'

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This article is based on ongoing research in Vanuatu and the wider Pacific. It maps multi-level roles that education and development policy actors, and civil societies in particular, have increasingly been playing in official education and development policy activities. Most recently this has been in relation to the 'post-2015' agendas and processes that contributed to creating the 'sustainable development goals'. I argue that the decolonising discourses of self-reliance that gained traction in national independence movements have maintained emphasis in Vanuatu civil society and government approaches to national education and development policy. In considering these processes, I employ critical discourse analysis to interrogate some implications of current global(-ized) discourses and frameworks for education and development through lenses of decolonising regional histories and dynamic geo-political regional power relations.

Dynamic, indigenous kastom beliefs and practices are central to most aspects of life for most ni-Vanuatu people (Regenvanu 2010). They have been a foundation for the recognition and revitalisation of the 'traditional economy' and 'alternative' visions of development (Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs 2012). Related aspects of traditional/modern dialectics have long underpinned education and development processes and thinking; their negotiation at the interstices of complex economic, historical, and political changes through multi-level education, governance, and research relationships has been striking. The associated policy relationships are as rich and promising—and as disparate and varied—as those in the field of comparative and international education.

Keywords: Vanuatu, Melanesia, education and development policy, SDGs, SIDS, youth

INTRODUCTION

In Vanuatu's six provinces, consultation on the 2016-2030 National Sustainable Development Plan is underway as I write, following two years of government work on the plan (Cullwick 2016). Vanuatu is an archipelago of over eighty islands, each exposed to the variations of both natural and man-made environmental challenges that have significant influence not only on daily life, but also on approaches to planned 'development'. Vanuatu and its citizens, like many contexts and peoples in Oceania and elsewhere, continue to reconcile and recover identities that were challenged, even erased, during the colonial rule that was overthrown just a generation ago (Regenvanu, 1999; Sanga et al., 2004; Thaman, 1993). In spite of such legacies of suppression, multilingual *ni-Vanuatu* peoples, who collectively represent the highest national per capita number of languages in the world, have continued to live by the land and

ocean in alignment with related *kastom* beliefs and practices. There has been increasing formal policy articulation and recognition of what are identified as 'traditional'—or what, for the rest of the paper, in relation to Vanuatu and Melanesia, I refer to as *kastom*-oriented—approaches to 'development' and aspects of daily life.

In this article, I present analysis of the education and development policy environment of Vanuatu and, to a lesser extent, Melanesia, in which decolonizing, *kastom*-based discourses are simultaneously negotiated with international development initiatives within globally influenced policies for education. Dynamic, indigenous *kastom* beliefs and practices have been a foundation for the recognition and revitalisation of the 'traditional economy' and 'alternative' visions of development in Vanuatu, with increasing institutional support in the past decade (Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, 2012; Regenvanu, 2010; Forsyth, 2014). The article first reviews contemporary discourses that underpin education and development approaches in Vanuatu, and relates them to multiple and multi-level interests that have been deployed discursively to frame ongoing issues and positions. Contemporary international development discourses and education programmes include: post-2015 processes that culminated in the sustainable development goals (SDGs); work on small island (developing) states (SIDS); 'new' developments in regionalism in Oceania and the Pacific islands; changing roles for a wider range of non-state actors; and a shifting policy focus on youth. I analyse these particularly in relation to non-government organisations in Vanuatu working in education and with youth, and their involvement in and knowledge of sub-regional and regional policy processes for building post-2015 and sustainable development agendas.

METHODOLOGY

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) of education policy actors and processes has been the core methodological approach of this study. I have analysed written and enacted discourses in education policy activities, multi-level documentation, websites, groups and processes of the past decade (building on prior research into the EFA programme since 1990) through semi-structured interviews, observations and inter-textual and thematic text analysis. In CDA, key lenses of language, power and voice are central to understanding (and changing) naturalised social processes that may be inequitable or unjust (Blommaert, 2010; Fairclough, 2003; Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016). Policy actors contribute to define and shape education policies through initiatives at multiple levels of activity, including through global social policy programmes such as Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and what were first 'post-2015' and then 'sustainable development' agendas (McCormick, 2016; 2014; 2012; 2011).

I complement the CDA approach with critical globalisation and postcolonial theoretical perspectives that have served to foreground decolonising regional histories (Bhaba, 1994; Tikly, 2004; Nederveen-Pieterse, 2015). Through this research, I have sought to identify and understand whose experience, knowledge and voices are included, and what kinds of contributions and roles they play in policy formation at multiple levels. This has involved investigating, for example, how participatory education and development policy processes are, and in what ways 'sustainability' has been deployed or understood. Driving questions for the research have included:

- (How) are multi-level processes inter-related? (How) do national and regional discourses and initiatives 'feed up'?

- (How) are global processes relevant to national and/or local contexts; (how) are they perceived as relevant?

Discussions with a range of Vanuatu education actors have provided powerful, if mixed, insights for better understanding these policy discourses and related processes.

More specifically, I have considered which civil societies and non-government actors have participated in education policy processes in Vanuatu. Also included is analysis and mapping of shifts in actors and participation of non-governmental education coalitions. I undertook twelve semi-structured interviews with government and non-government education policy actors in Port Vila in 2015, and where I had previously visited multiple times since 2009, including for doctoral research (McCormick 2014; 2012; 2011). I met with eight employees at six organisations and four from government agencies[i]. In order to maintain anonymity, I refer to individual participants throughout the paper by randomly designated letters of the alphabet. Interviews can offer only partial insights at particular moments in time. I am aware that particular aspects of my identity as a female, non-*ni-Vanuatu* researcher would have potentially influenced our interactions and perceptions in varying ways and to different degrees (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). As far as I could, I engaged with this aspect of researching as a 'foreign' guest in a society by discussing with participants my prior time in Vanuatu with my family, my professional and personal relationships, and previous work researching and teaching in the sub-region. I obtained approval to conduct the research from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC) and the University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee. I undertook to make all materials, including this article, available to the VCC and the participants who generously gave their time in what, I hope, was recognised as a mutual commitment to contributing, however modestly, to education and our understandings of it in our region.

The interviews for this research were undertaken just a month prior to Cyclone Pam in March of 2015, the implications of which cannot be documented in any substantive way here, but must be recognized as an example of the significance of climate-based vulnerabilities and contextual influences on education and development. This is particularly so for small islands in the Pacific Ocean in terms of exposure, infrastructure, recovery, and resources; indeed, Vanuatu is considered amongst the most 'vulnerable' in the world to natural disasters. On returning to Port Vila in November 2015 to co-host the regional education conference from which this Special Issue of the journal resulted, the damage to facilities, landscape, and even to the hub of the Vila market, were visible and yet already significantly restored in those few months. Conference delegates from 11 countries were impressed by the evident achievements, resilience and will of *ni-Vanuatu* people in the recovery efforts, and in offering a warm welcome (www.ocies.org). For the USP Emalus Campus and local accommodation, catering, and Ministry representatives to have agreed and contributed to hosting an international conference, that included a mini-lesson demonstration in Bislama, based on the national language policy, and so soon after a national disaster of such scale, merits our acknowledgement, respect and thanks being recorded again here.

MULTI-LEVEL EDUCATION POLICY DISCOURSES, NETWORKS AND TRANSFER

For over a quarter of a century, formal global programmes of development— including EFA, the MDGs and now the SDGs—have attempted to frame funding and programmes of education

in nations, many of them former colonies, that are identified as developing or poor by various measures. In many aid-receiving countries, tensions have long-existed between these and locally-derived approaches embedded in decolonising aims and practices[ii]. Often, conformity to externally pre-defined, 'measurable', international development conditions or indicators has been required in order to receive funding (Sanga, 2011; Thaman, 1993).

Alongside associated multi-level negotiation processes for education and development, the long-existing community, *kastom*-based approaches such as those seen in Vanuatu's celebration of the traditional economy, or the sub-regional Melanesian 'Alternative Indicators for Development' programme, have not until recently 'counted' as 'development' (Malvatumauri, 2012). As *ni-Vanuatu* anthropologist, former head of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and politician Ralph Regenvanu has frequently written (1999; 2010), the prioritisation of a model of formal schooling aimed at employment in either bureaucratic government roles or a 'global economy', and derived from what are now post-industrial societies, has not proven appropriate or successful for the majority of the Vanuatu population. Such a version of development has been aligned with a particular manifestation of modernity or modernisation, and a liberal capitalist version of progress that is oriented to consumption, productivity, economic growth, and global economic integration on that basis, and the form and role of education within it as geared toward that purpose (Tikly, 2004; Shuurman, 2009; Regenvanu, 2010).

There have, of course, been mixed interpretations and levels of support for these and other visions, and how to achieve them. Acknowledgement and incorporation of what have been identified as locally relevant aspects of sustainable approaches to education and development in Vanuatu, as elsewhere in the region, have increased (Malvatmauri, 2012; Forsyth, 2014). As one observer very clearly put it: "…focusing on the formal economy as a top priority will not foster sustainable development outcomes in Vanuatu...." (Forsyth, 2014, p.1). Such seeming disjuncture with aspects of official development aid discourses and practice began even before struggles for independence a generation ago, thus representing continuity for Vanuatu and the region (Regenvanu, 1999; Sanga et al., 2004). Calls for ongoing decolonisation and increased autonomy of approach and participation were included in national EFA plans, and again reflected in regional critiques of the MDGs that were widely asserted in the post-2015 preparation stages (McCormick, 2014).

Government and civil society leaders' regional reflections in the aftermath of the global program of the MDGs have been consistent with long-expressed messages about aid and education (McCormick, 2014). They identified what was useful about the MDGs, and what was omitted—in word and/or deed. In particular, the focus of strategy and delivery on formal primary schooling to the neglect of ECCE, adult literacy, and quality has been widely noted in the sub-region. These concerns were expressed in regional 'post-2015' documentation and fora, including the Pacific Framework and Pacific Plan review process (Republic of East Timor, 2013). Their related views on future directions for policy focus include: a call for genuinely participatory policy processes, and for ownership; "management" of external donor and multinational interests; inclusion of a range of not-for-profit and private actors (however not-for-profit organisations contested the unequal degrees of access and representation for private actors), and a need for 'alternative', contextual conceptions of poverty and well-being.

While statements delivered by *ni-Vanuatu* politicians in high-level post-2015 agenda processes, for example by the Prime Minister or UN representative, have been more qualified in their apparent acceptance of growth-oriented development approaches than those of not-for-

profit civil society organisations, there is still an unequivocal message regarding the need for ownership, equity, and equality in development processes. In late 2015, at the Post-2015 Development Summit, the then Prime Minister asserted that,

> *…development cooperation must become more effective and aligned to country programs and goals. Development aspirations must be country driven, firmly grounded in national development policies and practices. Development partners must make predictable and readily available financing, immune from conditionality, to SIDS and LDCs… implemented through an approach that is open, transparent, data driven and that deviates from' business-as-usual. Our approach must shift from a north-south framework of interaction… reviewing development priorities and the way in which resources are channelled… (GoV, 2015).*

In light of environmental changes and other shared policy concerns, there has been an intensification of the activities and networking between SIDS worldwide, framed in the Barbados Plan of Action and Mauritius Strategy for Implementation (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2014). The Prime Minister also refers to the discourse on SIDS, emphasising that, "For small developing island states like Vanuatu, resources must be channelled to genuinely boost human resources and production capacities" (GoV, 2015).

Education actors and organisations in Vanuatu share information and skills through multi-level links and in 'triangular' cooperation with traditional donors and 'southern' donor partners. The regional CSO Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)—funded by Australia, New Zealand and a range of donors and international non-governmental organisations—has served as a uniting organisation in areas of advocacy and research training, information sharing, and resource mobilisation for a number of Pacific and Melanesian countries, including PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Moreover, national education CSO coalitions in Melanesia—Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy (PEAN), Vanuatu Education Policy Advocacy (VEPAC) and Cooperation in Education in Solomon Islands (COESI)—have been united for regional information sharing and training sessions. They have created networks and carved spaces in education policy deliberations for EFA and national strategies, within which they have been building their platforms for post-2015 and SDG engagement (ASPBAE, 2016; VEPAC, 2013; McCormick, 2014). Furthermore, a range of new mechanisms for funding, monitoring and sharing is emerging, for example online tracking such as that on the SDG Philanthropy Platform, where contributions are measured and analysed against SDGs retrospectively to 2010 http://sdgfunders.org/sdgs/goal/quality-education/lang/en/.

Through these kinds of advocacy, funding and networking activities, the related policy architecture for the SDGs has expanded to take in a wider range of non-state actors, of which not-for-profit civil society is just one part. However, although processes have 'widened' since formation of the MDGs and EFA, they remain technicised in terms of agency approaches at multiple levels, and politicised (ASPBAE 2014). Examples of other regional contributions to the post-2015 processes include a University of the South Pacific (USP) Youth Forum feeding into UNDP post-2015 processes and promotion through a Pacific youth Facebook group. However, as one Port Vila participant from a youth organization stated unequivocally, "global and regional goals support national and local aims, not vice-versa" (B). The next sections consider how national organisations in Vanuatu viewed and participated in the post-2015 processes and development of the SDGs.

VANUATU PERSPECTIVES

As a number of participants observed, Vanuatu and, particularly Port Vila, has a large range of active non-government and civil society organisations relative to the size of the community. There are many organisations working in different areas of education and with youth. Over the years, organisations' degree of activity and survival has depended externally on funding continuity, delivery and scale, and internally on leadership and will. The Vanuatu Education Policy Advocacy Coalition (VEPAC) has become significantly more active in recent years for all of these reasons, and in relation to the connectivity and networks with groups throughout the sub-region and regionally through the ASPBAE as discussed above. VEPAC members, like those of the other coalitions in Melanesia, include local and national organisations—NGOs, teachers' unions, churches, women's, and other issue-focused organisations—but, as some participants noted, not all organisations working in education in Vanuatu are members of VEPAC. One felt that there were competing aims, and that as an organisation they instead needed to focus on their activities, while another was unclear about the nature of VEPAC's work, beyond the literacy survey conducted in Shefa in 2010. That survey was commended a number of times for having offered a very useful, if sobering, insight into the state of literacy in that province—Participant D described the levels of literacy found as a "shock to the community"—and for galvanising increased interest and will.

While the governance of these formal groups is increasingly recognisable as 'modern' or 'Western', it is important to underscore that *ni-Vanuatu* communities and people have long been bound in many activities, beliefs, language and, especially, relationships, by *kastom.* In this sense there have been long traditions of active, informal civil society that both echoes and is entwined with the real influence of the traditional economy and in which *kastom* activities are implicated. An example of this is the woven mat education, making, offering and trading as promoted in a recent project by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre; VCC's cadre of field workers throughout the islands has at different times played pivotal roles in education around these and other forms of civic engagement. The Pacific Institute for Public Policy (PIPP) is another organisation that is currently playing a highly active role at multiple levels related to the promotion of the SDGs. The PIPP's work in this area included the Ministry of Education's citizenship curriculum, which involved a high school debating competition that culminated in a final round on SDGs held in Parliament house with Ministerial and Department of Education representation, and other distinguished observers (McGarry, 2015). Wan Smol Bag is another local organisation that has been highly active in youth and education policy and practice in a range of ways and at multiple levels, throughout both Vanuatu and elsewhere in the region, but is yet again different to both of those just described in its foci on health and youth.

A number of participants referred to successes in education resulting from formal donor, government and community policy initiatives and planning over the past decade. These included the Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy (VESS), the Vanuatu Education Road Map (VERM) and VERM's successor the Vanuatu Education Sector Programme (VESP). These all tied in with the wider development programme seen in the Priorities and Action Agenda (PAA) national development plan that precedes the national sustainable development plan that is currently being negotiated (GoV, 2006). The core education aim in the PAA plan was to, "Develop a distinctively ni-Vanuatu education system" that would, "empower future generations to become self-reliant in managing their own life and careers as individual members of their community, society and the nation as a whole" (GoV, 2006). Among other initiatives supporting the achievement of that aim have been the school grants and the national

language policy. One participant (E) noted that these activities have better responded to education needs in the provinces. Participant J also emphasised the positive responses of communities to tangible signs of action and change through the VESP goals for literacy and numeracy, and reported that they see that benefits are reaching rural communities where they may not have previously, for example in the language kits and support for teachers. Another participant (I) did highlight differences in policy and implementation, for example in relation to the well-regarded school grants programme, and in headmasters' understandings of policy, seen as still at times unclear.

The following sub-sections present insights gained from analysis of the interviews along two main lines of inquiry: the education actors and organisations involved in contributions to education and their knowledge of and involvement in processes for post-2015 and sustainable development agendas; and the cooperation, partnerships and integration of organisations in national and multi-level policy planning and processes. I then briefly discuss participants' additional perspectives on the post-2015 and SDGs, and Appendix 1 outlines ten targets tied to SDG4 for education, and relates them to the Vanuatu education context and policies.

Education organisations and post-2015 and SDG processes

Of the 12 participants interviewed, six responded that they had not heard of the post-2015 or SDG processes, while the other six knew of the post-2015 and SDG processes, and that their organisation had been either indirectly or directly involved. One participant had been directly involved in the multi-level policy deliberation processes themselves in relation to youth. Five considered that they had been indirectly involved.

Participant A worked for a government-affiliated department that had initially started discussing post-2015 two years previously, but reported that it was never a focus in the local education partners' group. However, other education partner group members were aware that the coalition VEPAC, also a member (discussed above), had made a submission about post-2015 processes. Participant B had been involved directly in two consultations, those at national and international levels related to the national sustainable development plan and the UNDP, also with input into the provincial development plans in 2014 and 2015. This participant strongly supported youth contributions and had mobilised discussions amongst youth in communities, with a view that even if they were not directly involved in the national sustainable development plan they could have input into the national meeting on issues such as economy, environment, and culture. The development of the PAA discussed above, had included national processes linked to the post-2015 dialogues. Participant C, whose organisation was not directly involved, was aware of 'rivalries' and agendas among different education actors, leading at times to some difficulty reaching consensus. Another participant (J), working with a government department, asserted the importance of community, and supported an 'opposite end' approach to outcomes, noting that community demand will be the 'big change' in terms of education provision.

Previously in this article I highlighted that in two areas—the economy and civil society—distinctions were made between formal and informal approaches. A similar sense of a division, whether artificial or partial, emerged in discussing and meeting with different departments and organisations in terms of informal and formal approaches to education.

For example, Participant K, from an organisation working with out of school youth in Port Vila and throughout the islands, works regularly with external providers through the National

Training Council and the organisation is partially funded by Oxfam International. Participant K said that at times there was some ambiguity for education in terms of which Ministry should be responsible. Indeed, Participant D referred to formal and non-formal education, which is managed by a separate Ministry, as 'parallel systems', and Participant I who works at an organisation involved in education and governance succinctly expressed that there is, "no cohesive body for education". Yet, despite this, many of these individuals and groups also discussed how they work together, as is detailed more in the next section.

Partnerships and integration of organisations in national and multi-level policy planning and processes

Participants discussed existing education networks within Vanuatu and the region, such as the VEPAC education coalition discussed previously and others for early childhood, women, and youth. Some of these are relatively new, and partnerships between ministries and other organisations have taken more consistent and cohesive forms with some actors and sub-sectors in recent years; for example, the early childhood education network is an area in which work has expanded rapidly in Vanuatu in recent years. Other examples are the networks developed around the SWAp (VESP), and the memorandum of understanding between VEPAC and the Ministry of Education. There is also inter-ministry coordination between the Tertiary and Further Education ministry, the Department for Youth and Non-formal Education, the Ministry of Education and the Commonwealth of Learning and Distance Education (Participant D). Individual organisations reported that they have collaborated and engaged in discrete projects within VESP, for example on different aspects of curriculum, civics education in high schools, work on Bislama resources, and in teacher education through the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education (VITE) (Participants B, C, H, I and K). A range of other fruitful collaborations, related particularly to youth education, were reported, for example on the Pacific Leadership Programme, with the youth parliament, national youth council and Transparency International. Participants D and J commented that such integration is being deliberately extended, although time pressures between ongoing, daily work and innovation and reflection have been the reason that it has not happened more cohesively or rapidly. Almost all of those interviewed noted the pressures of time even while recognising the benefits, importance and utility of advocacy, sharing information, and working together. There were mixed expressions regarding the extent of integration and clarity of activities, positions, and roles in relation to others working in education.

Some additional observations emerged during the interviews that are worth considering in relation to multi-level education and development policy processes. Participant A recognised the 'different' mood around the SDGs as compared to the positivity that was tied to the 'newness' of MDGs, as the first concerted global agenda for development, and referred to the SDG's broader targets and increased numbers of indicators.

A key concern from a number of participants was related to youth. Participant B told how in its 2009 census, the Ministry established that 66% of Vanuatu's population is under 30; "youth is the context of the constituency". As Participant C stated, young people are pushed out of the formal system at secondary level because of costs, space, and people's relative lack of mobility in a nation where transport costs are extremely high and the majority of the population live in rural and remote locations. They emphasised the recognition of different needs amongst youth in different areas. Where employment is critical for urban youth, capital and the development of their own land are priorities for rural youth. In addition, Participant K discussed the range

of national recruitment and awareness raising activities to engage with youth, including print and radio media, Facebook, direct letters, and through youth leaders and church communities.

In emphasising the precedence of the local and national over the global goals, Participant B cited the importance of the most recent Education Act[iii], also raised by Participant D, as something that will have real, tangible effects. A related point was made about school-based management, and the concern that students or youth representation is not present. In response to my mention of "Rethinking Vanuatu Education Together"—a book resulting from the Vanuatu conference in the regionally networked Rethinking Education in the Pacific Initiative (RPEI) and the PRIDE programme (Sanga et al, 2004)—during an interview, Participant J commented that in their view it discusses all the existing and long-standing issues, but that "timing, will and support are factors" in how and whether long-standing and acknowledged issues are addressed.

EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR VANUATU AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

The National Sustainable Development Plan for Vanuatu 2016-2030 is due for release later in 2016 (Cullwick, 2016). If all parties apply 'lessons learned', it could bring the nation closer to its long and frequently articulated self-reliance, and distinctly *ni-Vanuatu* vision, during a period that will also be framed by the SDGs. That global programme should, as asserted by one organisation leader, serve to support local needs and plans and not international or institutional interests. Perhaps inevitably, in light of the plurality that characterises the islands' geography, history and peoples, community dissonance during the consultation process has been reported. Some support promoting 'Christian Principles' as the basis of the plan, while others maintain the primacy of '*kastom mo kalja',* (Bislama for *ni-Vanuatu* custom and culture), the latter supported by the President of Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs (Cullwick, 2016). It is the latest example in the 'young' nation's postcolonial history that challenges whether and how reconciliation between the sets of interests and priorities discussed in this article could or should be reached, either discursively within the plan that has undergone such attentive construction, or in the education and development strategies that its purpose is to support. A set of relationships that merits further investigation is that between youth movements and organisations and formal education actors and education ministries. It became evident that, as both non-government and government participants expressed, 'youth' processes were in many ways de-linked from formal education processes. While common education aims and activities were highlighted, in many cases only piecemeal connections existed.

Critical analysis of discourse can assist in better understanding the changing frames of reference that first serve to justify activities and spending conducted in the name of various types of 'development', and then to legitimate their actualisation. CDA also serves to locate the policy stakeholders who participate in the promotion and realisation of what are, at times, disparate visions. As documented in this research, national and regional perspectives expressed by both government and non-state actors have remained emphatic that local needs and *kastom*-oriented development perspectives should not be subordinated to the requirements of global programmes. Also strongly asserted is that processes of development must change, even as some gains have been acknowledged. The question remains of how this will be borne out in relation to those aspects of the SDGs that continue to promote a type of development and

education—or academic schooling that is geared to serving formal, 'modern' economies—in environments such as Vanuatu where they may be only partially relevant, and serve only parts of the population. Resources for education expansion are likely to remain a challenge for some time in the contemporary global financial and political climate. Likewise, the repeated reported existence of corruption may continue to slow progress to equitable provision of relevant education based on principles of social justice, whichever vision of that justice is supported. As Participant B evocatively captured it, "If there's no space for corruption then it won't continue, but if there's no light on it then it flourishes". The endemic corruption, to which a number of participants referred, has been cited as one of the justifications for the conditionality associated with aid to education noted at the start of the article.

Despite enduring tensions in embracing 'alternative' versions of genuinely sustainable 'development', however, in Vanuatu strikingly significant changes in recognised participation and process *have* been evident, and continue to extend. Evidence of these changes is in the support of Ministries, the participation of non-state actors—albeit to mixed degrees and response—and more broadly consultative, multi-level processes. In these ways actors and organisations can maintain and strengthen the important solidarities within national and (sub)regional relationships that they have been building, and consolidate regional and sub-regional learning, sharing and support in continued decolonisation. These discourses, initiatives and the relationships that support them could serve as models for decolonising and multi-level processes in which a wider range of actors legitimately negotiate and seek to reconcile elements of 'modern' with 'traditional' in approaches to education, development and sustainability. For some, such formal recognition of these possibilities for policy and practice as is being supported in Vanuatu and other Melanesian contexts is very long overdue.

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APPENDIX 1

Targets for Sustainable Development Goal 4

SDG4 Target	Key Issues for Vanuatu
4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	Participants noted the high 'push out' at secondary level, and provisions of non-formal education and life skills or out of school youth. Other concerns were the lack of relevance of academic curricula noted elsewhere in Pacific island states, and language challenges. The SDG school debate and Ministry of Education's citizenship curriculum are an example of how this is being addressed (McGarry 2015).
4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education	This was signaled as a priority goal in Vanuatu in the PAA and EFA documentation, with significant activity since 2010. There was a summit for the first time on ECE in 2013. Ministry and partners Save the Children, World Vision and DFAT - in the early 2000's there was little discussion and only the *Priskul* association was identified as active.
4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university	Vanuatu Institute of Technology, VI Teacher Education, Rural Training Centres, the Maritime College, USP the Agriculture College AusAID/DFAT TVET program scaled up by government and transferred to local ownership, with associated accreditation program
4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship	Youth organisations playing key roles in this area Successful development of TVET policy AusAID/DFAT TVET program scaled up by government and transferred to local ownership, with associated accreditation program
4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations	Organisations active in these areas Some participants underscored the strength of *kastom* practices with different roles for men and women
4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	Participants noted as central to VESP goals, and delivering improvements to communities World Vision has worked in adult literacy. It has been noted as an area of the EFA and MGD programs that has been widely neglected by donors and governments.
4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable	This was not addressed or raised by the participants who were aware of the SDGs. The organization Live and Learn has been active in Vanuatu in education for sustainable development.

development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development	
4.8a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all	Significant work on the SWAp and school grant program including through the VESP and VERM.
4.8b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries	There has been repeated alleged corruption related to scholarships and decision-making processes in Vanuatu, as in other aid-receiving nations. Vanuatu participates in SIDS fora and discursive activities.
4.8c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States	A number of participants shared details of the significant effort that has been put into teacher education and support for teachers throughout the islands through and since the SWAp. Challenges of the bilingual system have been noted in various places. Remote communities; high proportion of recurrent budget allocated to salaries. PAA was to increase qualified teachers (GoV 2006); remains a challenge.

Notes

[1] Budget and mutual time constraints prevented me from meeting with actors in other organisations as I had hoped, but since I am to some extent familiar with their work and some is documented I have also taken them into consideration in the analyses.

[2] For example the 1970s Tololo Committee and Matane report in Papua New Guinea, or more recent Pacific-wide PRIDE programme (Coxon and Munce, 2008).

[3] The Education Act Number 9 (2014) was passed with seven principle objectives, the first of which is "to provide early childhood and care, primary and secondary education which is firmly based on Vanuatu cultures and beliefs". See: http://moet.gov.vu/docs/acts/Education%20Act_No.%209%20of%202014.pdf

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The Oceanic Researcher and the Search for a Space in Comparative and International Education

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This paper argues that, despite the increasingly espoused centrality of culture and context to the field of comparative and international education, the voices from within the context remain silent and absent from the literature on comparative and international education. This paper explores the various spaces in which an Oceanic researcher may operate. It draws on Epeli Hau'ofa' s Oceanic philosophy and Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity to begin shaping possible actionable and ethical spaces for Oceanic researchers to explore the future of comparative and international education research for the Pacific.

Key words: culture, context, Oceanic philosophy, theory of hybridity, actionable space, ethical space.

INTRODUCTION

What is the value of the comparative and international education field to the Pacific region? Despite over 100 years of comparative and international education discourse, there remains little contribution from the Pacific region to this field. This paper will draw from Epeli Hau'ofa's Oceanic philosophy as initially expounded in his seminal work, *Our Sea of Islands,* 1993, and Homi Bhabha's (Bhabha, 1995) theory of third space to suggest a hybrid space for Oceanic researchers in the field of comparative and international education. In this hybrid space, the appreciation for context sensitivity is explored to encourage context specific research approaches. It is proposed that perhaps in this hybrid space, there is located a purpose for the comparative and international education field for the Pacific. Further, by attempting to make comparative and international education relevant to the Pacific region, we can perhaps support Crossley' s (2010) claim:

Indeed, through such forms of context-sensitive research collaboration, small and other developing states could play a more creative and innovative role in contributing to the generation of new knowledge, perspectives and understandings – and in doing so, help to shape future international agendas for the benefit of all (p.428).

Given the social, economic, political and geographical context of the Pacific region what value can the field of comparative and international education research contribute? The recent change of name of the Australia and New Zealand so-called regional society for comparative and international education to a more inclusive name recognising Oceania as the region in which not only Australia and New Zealand but also many Pacific states and territories are located, presents a new season for exploring not only the field itself, but also its relevancy to the region.

This paper argues that a good starting point in this exploration is to head towards 'the context'.

SENSITIVITY TO CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Pacific region, located within the largest ocean in the world, spans a number of time zones on both sides of the international dateline and between the tropics. Although the wider region consists of mainly sovereign states, it also includes territories in free association with former colonial powers and colonies. In this article, however, 'Pacific region' specifically refers to 15 Pacific states and territories of: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Nauru, Palau, PNG, and Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. These 15 countries are members of the University of the South Pacific, as well as active members of the Pacific Forum Secretariat. These countries are independent sovereign states and have the authority to determine their own educational goals and priorities for development. The region is home to an estimated 9.7 million people with the highest concentration of population in the larger Melanesian countries of Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Solomon Islands. The region is also home to many of the micro states of the world, those with populations below 20,000 as in Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Tokelau and Tuvalu (UNESCO, 2015). The Pacific is also one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world; for example, Vanuatu with a population of approximately 200,000, has three official languages (Bislama, French and English) and 113 indigenous languages; Cook Islands with a population of just over 10,000 includes two indigenous languages and several dialects (UNESCO, 2015). The region is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and sea level rising with countries like Tuvalu and Kiribati at the forefront of this very real global problem. Economically, although the region is traditionally agriculture and fishery based it is now shifting to service industries such as tourism. Key donor agencies in the region include New Zealand, Australia, Japan and more recently China, amongst other aid agencies.

At the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) timeframe in 2015, the Pacific region had seen some significant progress in advancing the global agenda on education. Some of the notable progress has included; more than 80 per cent increase in participation in pre-primary education between 2000 and 2010 (increase from 39 per cent to 72 per cent); the adjusted net enrolment rate (ANER) for primary education was at 89 per cent in 2012. Participation in lower secondary education has increased from 44 per cent in 2000 to 77 per cent in 2012 (UNESCO, 2015), there are more technical and vocational education opportunities for Pacific youths providing possible alternative pathways, and across the region efforts have been made to improve teacher quality.

However, as the global agenda moves from the MDG and EFA to the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), unfinished business for the region remains. The core areas of unfinished businesses that remain include: improving quality education at all levels; improving the relevancy of education and learning; improving governance, management and financing of the education sector; improving monitoring and data management capacity; strengthening of partnerships in areas such as education research across the region (UNESCO 2015).

Sustainable Development Goal 4 which seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" is promoted through 10 related targets to be achieved by 2030. At a glance, the unfinished business of the EFA combined with SDG Goal 4 provides a generous context for comparative and international education research in the Pacific. It is worth noting that at least two of the SDG Goal 4 targets draw attention to small island developing states.

The Pacific region is a diverse context, in cultures, in geography, economics and in politics. The diversity of the region is compounded by the tensions between local contexts and the global agenda of the past MDGs and now the SDGs. How Pacific people, development partners and researchers engage with the SDG programme within the diversity of the regional context presents plentiful opportunity for research from a comparative and international education perspective.

In the field of comparative and international education there has always been recognition of a socio-cultural dimension to the discourse. Early works of Sadler (1900), Kandel (1933) and Hans (1959) highlighted the socio-political context within which education and schools are located. In theory, just as the field is recognised for its multi-disciplinary and applied approach, and the importance of analysis and methodology that lies in working across jurisdictions, it also recognises the centrality of culture and context (Crossley and Jarvis, 2000).

For example, the work of Cowen (2006) amongst others has argued for the role of context within the comparative and international education field. As Cowen (2006) maintains, comparative and international education "always deals with the intellectual problems produced by the concept of context (the local, social embeddedness of educational phenomena) and transfer (the movement of educational ideas, policies and practices from one place to another, normally across a national boundary); and their relation" (Cowen, 2006:561).

Crossley (1990, 1999, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009) and Bray (2007, 2011) are two prominent comparative educationists who have over decades drawn attention not only to the cultural dimension of the field but, more specifically for the purpose of this paper, to the small island state context. Since the 1980s and 1990s there has been a growing literature on small island states recognising their particular 'ecology' rather than seeing them as scaled down versions of larger states. Crossley, through his works (1990, 1999, 2010), has been repeatedly calling for the voices of small states to be recognised in research:

> *If more effective cross-cultural partnerships are to develop, and increasingly powerful international agendas are to not perpetuate dependency, then the strengthening of local and regional education research and evaluation capacity could do much to inform and strengthen the voice of small states (Crossley, 1999, p. 60).*

However, the international literature on comparative and international education research to date seems to not move beyond the rhetoric of arguing for the importance of culture and sensitivity to the contexts researched. Similarly, while there is attention drawn to small island states in the works of Mark Bray, Michaela Martin, Michael Crossley and others, there has been minimal practical changes to bring the voice of the 'context' to the international conversation. The current conversation regarding the centrality of culture and context to the field remains generally for 'outsiders', for researchers, academics and development partners who are external to the context. The question asked here is, if the voice of insiders are included in the conversations about comparative and international educational research, what inferences would this have on research approaches, on methodology and on the knowledge generated? The work of Hau'ofa on Oceanic philosophy provides a foundation for problematizing the historical reliance on 'outsiders' perspectives on the Pacific, and an entry point for Pacific 'insiders' perspectives/voices within the field of comparative and international education.

OCEANIC PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

Epeli Hau'ofa's Oceanic philosophy has inspired and influenced the work of many scholars, artists and students since its conception in the 1980s. Hau'ofa described his 'sea of islands' as follows:

> *Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed place, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom (1993, p. 16).*

Hau'ofa's call for an alternative perspective on the Pacific was a bold statement intended to recapture the identity of Pacific people as ocean people. Hau'ofa argued for a more holistic perspective of the Pacific region. Further he argues for a grander view of the world's largest ocean, recognising its rich resources and the presence of ocean people in these waters over millennia. Hau'ofa's alternative perspective is in contrast to the notion of 'islands in the sea', that refers to the tiny specks of land space that are spread across this region. The notion of 'islands in the sea' is based on views of people from large continents with land based cultures and ways of viewing the world. Such a notion defines space as confined to land. It is within such a view that the Pacific Ocean, was carved, defined and mapped into blocks and pieces of space, effectively reducing vast oceanic views to small island views. This land based view—not only of Pacific peoples but also their relation to the rest of the world—was introduced in the last approximately 200 years.

The developments of formal education, religion and formal governance have been based on this notion of 'islands in the sea'. Consequently, views of 'development' for the Pacific nations in recent times also have been based on this definition. Issues of remoteness, geographical isolation, small economies of scale, vulnerability to climate change, and lack of human capacity are only a few of the common descriptors of Pacific island states. Along the same line, are descriptions of aid dependency, low economic performance and political instability. On the other hand, there are the descriptions of the 'tropical paradise' with an equally simplistic view of the region and its people. It seems that the descriptions of the Pacific Islands are either from a development deficit perspective or from a romanticised view.

When Hau'ofa offered his view on the 'sea of islands' over 20 years ago, it was criticised for many reasons including from those who saw it as a romanticised view of the region. However, in today's world, with the advancement of technology, the increasing availability of internet access, the increased frequency of flights with larger carriers travelling in, out and around the region, the very notion of space and time offered through Hau'ofa' s Oceanic philosophy is clearly a reality for many. Pacific lecturers at the University of the South Pacific typically teach from their desks in Fiji through satellite connection to students in locations spreading as far north as Marshall Islands and as far east as Cook Islands and Niue. Tongans from Alaska, Beijing, London, San Francisco, Tokyo, through social media and live stream radio, can and

do keep in touch with events and news in Tonga just as easily as Tongans who live in Nuku'alofa and the 'remote' northern islands of Niuafo'ou. In fact Tongans, Tuvaluans and Samoans are some of the most well-travelled populations in Oceania. Moreover, traditional artefacts such as mats, tapa, wood carving and kava have seen a significant increase in production and in selling price driven by demand from the global Pacific diaspora. The world described by Hau'ofa of Oceanic peoples and their sprawling world, is truly here.

Hau'ofa's reclaiming of Oceania has over the decades since given the needed encouragement for other Pacific scholars to reclaim Indigenous knowledge systems and philosophies and to offer alternative views to the region. His Oceanic philosophy influenced the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative (RPEI) initially funded by the New Zealand government in 2000. RPEI gave space for Pacific educators, researchers and academics to challenge approaches to education development and offer alternative perspective to the prevailing deficit approach to development in the region. One of the champions of the RPEI, Taufe'ulungaki, reflecting on being a Pacific researcher, stated:

> *The reasons for the failures of development strategies are, I believe, neither due to the inefficiency, nor to a lack of human capacity and strong commitment to good governance, nor to unconducive economic environments, poor resource bases, political instability or combinations thereof, which are often cited by research and study documents. To me, these are symptoms of fundamental flaws in the paradigms themselves and are not due to ineffectiveness in their implementation or imperfect understanding of their rationale and guiding principles. It is my contention that we need to look for the causes in the core values underpinning western development paradigms in order to understand the inherent contradictions between avowed developmental goals and outcomes (Tuafe'ulungaki, 2001, p.1)*

Taufe'ulungaki and her colleagues in the RPEI movement, in their effort to bring the subject of context to the discourse on educational development for the region, argue strongly for greater understanding of values and philosophies and beliefs systems of Pacific people. Through the work of the RPEI, the Oceanic philosophy of Hau'ofa has been expanded and deepens for Pacific people to reveal underpinning values of their knowledge systems as well as to interrogate the values that underpin western development paradigms.

Hau'ofa's Oceanic philosophy has been further elaborated by the writings of Thaman (1998) who argues that the "continued dominance of a western educational model of teaching and learning [that] both directly and indirectly lead many Pacific Island people to think that the wisdom of their own cultures is worthless or at least irrelevant to modern educational development", p.3). An example of this can be seen in responses to the introduction of a recent policy change by the Tonga Ministry of Education. The new language policy directed the language of instruction for the early grades to be solely in Tongan with transition to English at Year 3 to Year 4 and progressively more English to be used by secondary school level. Despite over five years of implementation of this language policy, there remain teachers and parents who still complain about the policy and blame the language policy for poor student performance. While there may be valid criticism regarding the implementation processes for

the language policy change, what is worth noting here is the insistent belief about the value of the English language over the Tongan language and the extent it is shared amongst teachers and parents. As such it is not just about examining foreign paradigms of development, but it is also about examining Pacific peoples' values, believes and aspirations. The works of Thaman and Taufe'ulungaki draw attention to the complexities of Pacific voices; just as the 'insider' can be supportive, it can also be its own worst critic. Similarly, not all 'outsider' voices are negative and superficial.

The beginning of a new global agenda, the SDG era, combined with the activation of the Oceania society for comparative and international education, makes it timely to consider Sanga's (2005) call for 'better understanding of relationships' between Pacific and non-Pacific. Sanga (2005) argues that there is a:

> *...pressing need for a new type of scrutinisers, those who are fundamentally committed to making relationships in educational aid energising and positive for all partners. The need is for scrutinisers who are leaders. Many of these must be Pacific Islanders who are familiar with the worlds of education, aid, politics, and Pacific societies. Some of these new scrutinisers are non-Pacific Islanders, who have lived in Pacific societies, worked with Pacific Islanders, and who have demonstrated deep understanding of Pacific peoples…These two categories of people form the new scrutinisers. As a group they understand both worlds; the metropolitan and the Pacific; the city and the village. They appreciate the tensions, complexities, and dilemmas of both worlds. As leaders, they see the need for change and aspire to develop a vision for the change (Sanga, 2005, p.16).*

In Hau'ofa' s Oceania, there is sufficient space for Pacific people and non-Pacific people, the very group of scrutinisers identified by Sanga to take the leadership needed in educational development. The works of Taufe'ulungaki, Thaman, Sanga, Coxon and others through the Rethinking movement (Kabini Sanga, 2005), have deepened the notion of 'sea of islands' and the Oceanic philosophy of Hau'ofa. Hau'ofa's open invitation to an Oceanic space not only encourages the voices of Pacific people in all their complexity and diversity, but also more recent 'travellers' who have come to call this region their home. In today's Pacific, the voices are diverse, complex and multi-faceted with an increasing blurring of the lines between 'insider' and 'outsider' as we continue to see growing diaspora of Pacific peoples spread across Oceania.

How and what can the field of comparative and international education do in an ever changing context of the Pacific? How can the field of comparative and international education provide a framework to ascertain whose voice counts, whose voice represents the 'pacific reality' and who's voice offers the most constructive way into the future? How can we create an open space to allow dialogue, creation and building to happen amongst all Pacific researchers in full recognition of its multiplicity of voices?

In the following section, I argue for a relational, hybrid and dialogic approach to creating a third space for the Oceanic researcher to work within.

A POSSIBLE FUTURE CONTEXT

In an attempt to create a space for the Oceanic researcher (Pacific researchers as well as non-Pacific researchers who call this region their home), there are two possible sources of guidance and inspiration. True to Pacific heritage, the source of guidance combines both local and global forms of knowledge.

The first source is from oral history and the geography of Pacific voyages and settlement. Throughout Polynesia, there are small islands named *Motutapu* (sacred island). *Motutapu* stands at the entrances to great harbours and they were places of sanctuary where travellers would rest until it is safe to continue their journey. *Motutapu* stands at the entrance to Tongatapu, at Te Avanui in Borabora, between Ra'iatea and Taha'a in Tahiti and at the entrance to Rarotonga. There is also a *Motutapu* at the entrance to the Wai-te-mata Harbour in New Zealand (Taonui, 2008). *Motutapu* is a gateway between the inner islands and the far ocean. In all locations, *Motutapu* has been used as a place of sanctuary from internal wars or as a place for negotiations, a middle ground, a place for rejuvenation as well as a place to launch new journeys.

The second source is from Homi Bhabha's (Bhabha, 1994) theory of hybridity. Bhabha argues that a starting point is recognising cultural differences, that people hold different values, philosophies, beliefs, traditional knowledge systems and languages. People come to this ocean with different perspectives, experiences and views of the world. In order to better understand the cultural differences that exist, Oceanic researchers are encouraged by Taufe'ulungaki (2001), "…to dig deeper to understand cultural values, belief systems and philosophies that underpin Pacific systems and structures. At the same time interrogate assumptions and structures and processes that have been inherited with limited questioning. As Oceanic researchers, there is the need to always ask questions such as: 'whose knowledge? Whose cognitive and philosophical theories? Whose research paradigms, whose methodologies, techniques and procedures?' " (Taufe'ulungaki, 2001, p. 8).

From an understanding of cultural differences, Oceanic researchers can better translate the indigenous knowledge systems and realities of Pacific people and make sense of global agendas, such as the SDG. In the act of translation, Bhabha highlights processes of cultural representation and reproduction. For Pacific educators working in New Zealand and Australia who try to use the time honoured traditions of Talanoa and Fono, there is recognition that despite all attempts to explain the values and philosophies that underpin these two concepts, words cannot fully capture the holistic knowledge system that surrounds them. It can be argued that Pacific educators also re-produce the Talanoa and Fono in another form.

It is in the very act of re-production and cultural translation that Pacific educators and researchers create new structures and new initiatives. Bhabha (1994) highlights that while the act of translation and re-production may not be fully understood within the wisdoms of the original, it has traces of feelings and practices that inform it; we can view the Talanoa and Fono concepts in use by Pacific educators in this way. The act of cultural translation gives birth to cultural hybridity where there is space to explore something different, something new and perhaps unrecognisable, but in that process find new areas of negotiation, drawing new meanings and representation.

In this state of hybridity, there is a possible space for Oceanic researchers. In theory, Bhabha (1994) points out that the third space enables other positions to emerge, it displaces, unsettles the histories that constitute it and at the same time it settles the 'unsettled'. The third space sets up new structures of authority and new political initiatives; it is an ambiguous area that

develops when two or more individuals/cultures interact. The third space is a place of continuous tension and negotiation. But if the third space is in *Motutapu*, then it can also be a place of rejuvenation, a sanctuary, a place to launch new journeys. This article puts forward the idea that *Motutapu* is a space of opportunity for Oceanic researchers to ponder, to critique, to build new methods in and approaches to the field of comparative and international education for this region.

In this hybrid *Motutapu* there is the opportunity to explore a common actionable space (Sharma-Brymer, 2007). In such a space, Sharma-Brymer argues, there lies the opportunity to raise awareness of self-efficacy and awareness of social conformity, which may lead to tensions and conflicts but there is also opportunity for hope and new directions. In this actionable space, there is the chance to question the purpose and value of the comparative and international education field to the Pacific region.

From a Pacific people's perspective, an actionable space may be what Taufe'ulungaki argues for in the role of a researcher. Taufe'ulungaki argues that the "primary role of research in the region is to develop a uniquely Pacific world view, that is underpinned by Pacific values, beliefs systems and ways of structuring knowledge which will become the core values and ideologies driving the development process in the region as well as the education system, the key instrument in its promotion" (Taufe'ulungaki, 2001, p. 5).

For Pacific people, research must be worthwhile, useful and applicable to transforming the lives of Pacific people. As such, operating in praxis makes sense in the Pacific context, that theory and practice are intertwined in Pacific people's world view. The Oceanic researcher is one who is actively involved in Pacific societies, working to change mind sets and expand power and control for the benefit of Pacific communities.

Further to 'actionable space' Oceanic researchers could also explore 'ethical space'. Ermine (2007) argues that "the 'ethical space' is formed when two societies, with disparate worldviews, are posed to engage each other …. [where there is the potential for] … a new partnership model of the ethical space, in a cooperative spirit between Indigenous peoples and Western institutions [that] will create new currents of thought" (Ermine, 2007, p. 194). The cooperative spirit called for by Ermine is critical for understanding the various ethical systems that are present in Oceania, both indigenous and introduced.

Sanga (2006) has repeatedly called for the study of Pacific ethics and has explored the Mala'ita ethical system. Thaman, Taufe'ulungaki and I have explored Tongan ethical protocol for research under the Kakala Research framework (Fua, 2014). Likewise, Nabobo-Baba (Nabobo-Baba, 2006) and others around the region have clarified and been exploring this ethical space for their contexts.

Determining the ethical space for Oceanic research is a question for further research, scrutiny and collective dialogue. For now, in this space of hybridity, this article suggests a '*Motutapu*' for Oceanic researchers to explore a collective actionable space, an ethical space for Oceanic researchers in the field of comparative and international education. Suffice it to say here that in this space, relationships will be critical to opening the doors towards greater co-ordination, collaboration and co-operation.

CONCLUSION

In the early 1990s, the Oceanic philosophy of Epeli Hau'ofa cut a path for Pacific scholars to follow in calling for the rethinking of Pacific education, to reclaim Pacific world views, values,

and philosophies, and to restore Pacific dignity. These efforts built on the earlier work over previous decades in which Pacific educators had been expanding their world view, sometimes quite independently of New Zealand and Australian academics, but with few opportunities to truly collaborate.

The hybrid *Motutapu* suggested in this paper for the Oceanic researcher can uphold actionable and ethical spaces to allow for rich dialogical, hybrid and relational based approaches as espoused by the Oceanic philosophy of Hau'ofa. Further, the hybrid *Motutapu* has the potential to explore the dialogical and relational aspects of comparative and international education in the context of the Pacific region. As Lee, Napier and Manzon (Lee, 2014) argue, "Comparative education always works in dialectics, considering views that seem to be in opposition, but at the same time generating richer meanings in the process of considering such opposing views" (p.146).

BRAINS AND PADDLE, (Thaman K. H., 1993)

Thinking is tiring

like paddling against the waves

until feeling comes lightly

late into the pacific night

when these islands calm me

stroking my sorrows

I ask for silence

And they give it

I ask for forgiveness

And they raise my face

I carried with me scars

from loving and knowing

many planets

but when I fell asleep

the ocean sounds gathered

my dreams into its depths

and for the first time

I did not feel responsible

for the pain of the earth

or the darkness of night

today I wonder

what the difference

is between one sea and another

or how to recover morning

and conquer doubt

the pulse of our separate brains

has the answer

it is in our becoming

that we are one

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Defying Definition: Rethinking Education Aid Relationships in Solomon Islands

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The discourse of aid—its language, structures and practice—powerfully ascribes roles and attributes to those involved in aid relationships such as developed/developing, partner, recipient/donor etcetera. This discourse is driven by a complex system of diverse and often competing ideas, values, actors and relationships, within which individuals must make sense of their role and agency at both professional and personal levels. While recent years has seen much focus on improving relationships by reordering some of these categories, little research has investigated how individuals themselves make sense of all this, and how it then influences their practice. The research presented in this article investigated the professional subjectivities of a small group of public servants working for the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development in Solomon Islands. The primary aim of the research was to explore the ways in which professional subjectivity is influenced by, and influences, aid relationships in Solomon Islands. The research findings demonstrate the complexity and multiplicity of professional subjectivities within the education sector in Solomon Islands and provide insight into how this impacts on aid relationships and aid effectiveness. The research findings highlight the need to move beyond reified binaries of 'self' and 'other' and resist the appeal of bounded categorisations of aid actors. Embracing the dissonance inherent in aid relationships and continually reflecting on the dynamic interaction between discourse, professional subjectivities and individual agency are offered as potential means for strengthening education aid relationships across Oceania and beyond.

Key words: Solomon Islands, education aid, aid relationships, development partnerships, professional subjectivity, discourse, reflexive ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Relationships based on partnership, ownership, and local leadership have been posited as central to the effectiveness of aid to Solomon Islands education reform over the last decade (Pederson and Coxon, 2009; Coxon and Tolley, 2011; Tolley, 2012). Yet, simultaneously, these relationships are embedded in a broader framing of the Solomon Islands' development challenges, in which deficits of the so-called local 'partners' and leaders—the public service and parliament—are positioned as key barriers to development. Through this lens, the application of 'superior' technical expertise and management models from 'developed' nations such as Australia and New Zealand is the main solution offered by aid actors to the capacity deficits supposedly inherent in local systems. Within each of these competing discourses—or systems of language, ideas, and practice—the actors involved in aid are ordered in particular ways in relation to each other and attributed particular professional and social attributes. Scholars have conjectured about the impact (positive and negative) of such discourses on the motivation and perceptions of those working within aid relationships, and in turn, on the

effectiveness of aid relationships in achieving positive change (see Escobar, 1995; Eyben and Moncrieff, 2006; Groves and Hinton, 2004). However, there is little research that has directly asked actors involved in aid relationships what they think about these discourses, how they reconcile the different, often contradictory discourses in which they operate, and how their sense of themselves as professionals is impacted.

The research presented in this article attempted to address these questions in examining how individual staff members of the Solomon Islands' Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) experienced and perceived the relationships and roles that aid discourse ascribed to them. Underpinning the research is a belief, motivated by my own personal experience as an aid worker, that by better understanding how aid relationships impact on professional subjectivity (and vice versa) we can contribute to improving those relationships. This article first outlines the research's conceptual framework and relevant aspects of the Solomon Islands context, including my positioning as researcher and aid actor. A brief description of the methodology is provided, followed by presentation of key findings. The article concludes with some thoughts on why and how these findings matter for strengthening educational relationships in Oceania. I acknowledge and thank those who generously agreed to speak with me for the purposes of this research and gave up their time to do so.

AID, DISCOURSE AND SUBJECTIVITY

This section briefly outlines the theoretical debates and key concepts of aid, discourse and subjectivity, before turning to the specific case of aid and subjectivity in the Solomon Islands education sector. Aid and international development discourse have long been implicated in the "making and unmaking" of subjects, that is, the social construction of social identities (Escobar, 1995). Aid discourse is used here to refer not only to linguistic aspects such as ordering categories of 'developed/developing' or 'donor/recipient' but the real-world practices, interactions, and ideas that are represented and enacted through language, including processes of social identification. As Baaz (2005) explains,

> *…discourses and representations are institutionalised and materialised through different practices (...) practices are constituted within different discourses, and, therefore (…) all social practices have a discursive aspect (p.13).*

A significant body of work has examined the way in which the aid discourse—the language, ideas, structures and practices of the aid 'industry'—shapes the social identities of actors involved in aid and the relationships between these actors (Crewe and Harrison, 1998; Escobar, 1995; Eyben and Moncrieffe, 2006). Post-development writers in particular have argued that aid discourse acts as an instrument of power that serves to define those involved in aid in a way that maintains a power relationship of the 'developed' over the 'developing', while silencing alternative representations (Escobar, 1995; 1997; Ferguson, 1994, Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Mitchell 2002; Shore and Wright, 1997). From this perspective, concepts such as partnership, ownership, and participation have been 'co-opted' by aid agencies; it is not a genuine effort to rebalance power relations, but 'empty rhetoric' used to hide other motives of the aid hegemony (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994).

There are many examples of where such concepts have been espoused by aid actors but not effectively or genuinely implemented in practice, which lends credence to the post-development writers' claims. However, the post-development literature has been widely critiqued for its reliance on simplified, unquestioned dichotomies of developed/developing, Western/non-Western and an assumption of aid as some monolithic, homogenous force, in which aid actors conspire to work together to maintain superiority over powerless 'locals' (Baaz 2005; Crewe and Harrison 1998; Mosse and Lewis, 2005). As Crew and Harrison (1998) contend, the "implicit assumption is that developers develop, while local people resist, and arguably that this resistance is the most important part of their lives" (p.18).

In contrast, an emerging body of work grounded in detailed ethnographies of aid has exposed a much more complex picture of aid discourse and the diversity of the relationships and roles of actors involved in aid (Baaz, 2005; Crewe and Harrison, 1998; Eyben, 2006; Groves and Hinton, 2004; McKinnon, 2007; Mosse and Lewis, 2005). From this perspective discourse is not static and all-powerful, but dynamic and porous. That is, multiple, often conflicting discourses operate simultaneously and are continually changing as the result of the on-going interactions between ideas, actors, institutions, practices, and language within any given social field (Baaz, 2005). These writers also draw on the concept of subjectivity, as developed in the writings of Foucault (1982; 1991), and the fundamental premise that "the constitution of a social identity is an act of power" (Laclau, 1990 quoted in Hall, 1996, p.5). Subjectivity, in contrast to broader notions of identity, is concerned with the way in which the subject is situated, and through that 'made', in relation to power and discourse (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006; Hall, 1996). However, subject positions are not a-priori categories that individuals simply occupy according to the rules of the discourse: individuals engage in self-reflection and have agency in shaping their own subjectivities; in other words, they are not powerless to being defined by discourse (Hall, 1996). This means that, as with discourse, subjectivities are dynamic and multiple; at times competing and in conflict; and, actors and their subjectivities are mutually constitutive (Baaz, 2005).

POSITIONING THE RESEARCH

This research draws on these ideas of subjectivity and discourse to investigate the nature of professional subjectivities of senior staff of MEHRD in the heavily aided context of Solomon Islands. First the motivation and methodology for the research is outlined, highlighting my dual-role as researcher and aid actor.

Researcher Subjectivity

Over 2006-2009 I was based in Solomon Islands, working for the New Zealand High Commission, principally responsible for managing New Zealand's aid to the education sector. As an NZAID official, my role involved daily interaction with officials of MEHRD, related not only to NZ aid funding for the Ministry but also to aid coordination more broadly, as New Zealand held the position of 'lead donor' for the education sector-wide programme. My engagement was heavily structured within the aid effectiveness discourse of development partnership, capacity building, and fostering local ownership. I was not just delivering aid; I was 'coordinating' and 'harmonising'. I was meant to advise and suggest rather than demand and control. I worked to align NZAID's support to the decisions and priorities of the Ministry leadership and there was much emphasis on the need for trust and respect of sovereignty. Yet simultaneously, I was embedded in a discourse that positioned MEHRD as part of a weak,

corrupt public service, with poor governance and severe capacity deficits. Representing NZAID, I argued there was a need for reform of the Solomon Islands' public service culture to increase professionalism and improve accountability, and often used this argument to justify New Zealand's contribution to the 'partnership'. However, just as my MEHRD colleagues were not only MEHRD staff, I was not only an NZAID representative. We also interacted as people with diverse social identities and interests, beyond that of our professional roles.

I struggled to reconcile my experience of my own relationships and sense of subjectivity, and that of my MEHRD colleagues, with these discourses in which we were embedded. It was this experience that motivated this research. I was interested in understanding how my colleagues in MEHRD experienced such language and labels—to what extent, if at all, did these competing discourses influence their own sense of themselves as 'subjects' of aid. I was particularly interested to test out the validity of post-development critiques of the time, which were prominent within Solomon Islands as a backlash to what was perceived by some to be disempowerment and 'crowding out' of locals, as the result of too much aid and too many advisers with too much power (Kabataulaka, 2006; Moore, 2008; Pollard, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

In undertaking this research, given my history and relationships with those I was 'researching, I occupied both an 'insider' and 'outsider' role, a positioning that demanded a particular approach to the research. The research employed reflexive ethnographic approaches in the sense of drawing on knowledge gained from my "insider-outsider" position and engagement with the research participants over an extended period of time, combined with personal reflection and ethnographic interviews. This was embedded in a relatively in-depth exploration of the social, cultural and political context of Solomon Islands. The ethnographic interview method was chosen in part because it allowed me to take account of, and make use of, the pre-existing relationship I had with research participants, and my understanding and experience of the wider social context as a result of living in Solomon Islands for nearly four years. Ethnographic interviewing (also known as active interviewing) positions the interview as a "form of interpretive practice" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.17) that is an interpersonal, dynamic and interactive process of meaning-making and subject-making (Fife, 2005). Ethnographic interviewing allows for sharing of information and views by the interviewer, unlike traditional interviewing which shuns self-disclosure by the interviewer (Davies, 1999). This approach was appropriate for the research design given my simultaneous position of both 'insider' and 'outsider' (Mosse, 2005; Reed-Danahay, 2009).

The primary research involved semi-structured ethnographic interviews, one-on-one, with 10 MEHRD senior officials (six males, four females) undertaken in late 2009. The participants self-nominated to be part of the research and had been staff of MEHRD for an average for 15 years. All but one had previously been teachers. They came from a range of provinces within Solomon Islands. While targeting senior officials was a possible limitation of the research, it was justified in that they are the central actors in MEHRD decision-making, have influence over other staff, and are the key contacts for interactions with donors and aid funded technical advisers.

The interviews were analysed in a two-phase process, as recommended by Fife (2005). The first phase involved coding the material from the interviews into key themes and ideas. The second phase involved drawing together the material from the interviews, my personal reflections and the literature review to identify the central ideas or themes as well as the

relationships between these ideas: relationships of coherence as well as dissonance and contradiction.

The secondary research comprised of a literature review focusing on literature about aid relationships, partnership discourse, sector-wide approach (SWAp), and Solomon Islands political, governmental and socio-cultural history. This was complemented by my existing knowledge of the Solomon Islands context and the education sector. While often relegated to the 'background' section of research reports, in this article context is positioned as an integral part of the research process itself (Stephens, 2007). As such, the next section provides an overview of Solomon Islands society, state, and aid, focusing on the education sector and features relevant to understanding education aid relationships and professional subjectivities. This is followed by presentation of the results of the participant interviews. In order to maintain anonymity of individual participants, their verbatim comments are identified by a number assigned each participant bracketed with the letter P (for 'participant').

SOCIETY, STATE, AND EDUCATION AID IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

Solomon Islands is an archipelago in the south-west Pacific consisting of over 900 islands, of which some 300 are inhabited (Kabutaulaka, 1998, p.11). The population in 2009 was 515,000, approximately 50 percent of which was under the age of 20 and 80 percent were living in rural, relatively isolated, and geographically scattered areas (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, 2013). Although English is the official language of education, government administration and media, Solomon Islands *pijin* is the lingua franca and there are over 80 vernacular languages still in use. The islands are believed to have first been inhabited around 10,000 years ago and the first recorded contact with Europeans was in the 16th Century (Bennett ,1987, p.6-7; Kabutaulaka, 1998, p.11). In 1893 the British declared Solomon Islands a protectorate but it was not until post-World War Two that the British Administration established the foundations of a Westminster government model and some level of service delivery out to the nine provinces of the new nation (Bennett, 1987; Turnbull, 2002). Solomon Islands was granted independence in 1978 and this was followed by very rapid withdrawal of the British administration albeit with continued aid flows from Britain and increasingly Australia, New Zealand, the EU, and others (Bennett, 2002; Larmour, 1990). The newly independent government had little reach into, or legitimacy with, the citizenry outside of the capital Honiara and this has remained largely the case throughout the independent history of Solomon Islands as a nation-state. Prior to European settlement, social and political organisation in Solomon Islands was strongly kinship based, and leadership was organised through a meritocratic system in which power is ascribed not inherited (Bennett, 1987; Kabutaulaka, 1998). While this has, of course, significantly changed over the last century or more, the 'Big Man' system and kinship networks remain extremely strong forces in Solomon Islands. Power and authority were, and in most respects still are, highly personalised and depend primarily on one's wealth as well as skills (Kabutaulaka, 1998). However, equality of resources and power is seen as critical and, thus, a leader achieved power and authority not through the accumulation of wealth but the distribution of that wealth to their followers (and would-be followers).

As Hegarty et al. (2004) contend, rather than being the primary agent of authority in the country (as in Western-liberal democracies) Solomon Islands government (SIG) today is but one polity competing for place within the,

> *...patchwork of semi-autonomous indigenous micro-polities it was designed to replace – localised governance systems that Solomon Islanders had developed over thousands of years and successfully organised and ordered themselves (p.5) .*

The relationship between *kastom* ('traditional' culture) and 'the whiteman's way' of social, political, and economic organisation plays a central role in the discourse about development and governance in Solomon Islands. This relationship has often been positioned as a clash between systems based on kinship networks, distribution of wealth, and the personalisation of power, and the systems of a liberal democratic state with formal government positioned as distinct from a 'private sector' and 'civil society' (Brigg, 2009; Hegarty et al., 2004; Kabataulaka, 2006; Moore, 2008; Turnbull, 2002). The discord between these two perspectives, or the failure to acknowledge and account for the discord, is often cited (rightly or wrongly) as a reason for the perceived 'failure' of many development activities and the state in Solomon Islands (Gegeo & Gegeo-Watson, 2002; Kabutaulaka, 1998, p.21).

Aid has contributed significantly to the development and expansion of health, education, law and order, economic growth, and infrastructure in Solomon Islands. While the efficiency, efficacy, and value of this aid can be, and is, questioned, it is hard to deny aid's influence on the social and political landscape of Solomon Islands generally and the public service specifically. This is perhaps no truer than over the last seven years since the period known locally as 'the tensions'. The tensions, a period of internal conflict from 1998 to 2003, led to near collapse of the colonially-established institutions of government and law. Subsequent international intervention saw Solomon Islands become one of the most heavily aided countries in the world over the 2004-2010 period (World Bank, 2010). In the education sector between 30-40 percent of the government's education budget was aid-funded (ibid). Much of the aid flowing to Solomon Islands during this period was focused ostensibly on rebuilding the machinery of government and addressing the perceived key barriers of low capacity and nepotism in the public service, and corruption and weak governance at the political level (Hegarty et al., 2004; Moore, 2008).

This period of Solomon Islands' history coincided with the rise of what has been labelled the 'aid effectiveness agenda' at the global level. In this framework, effective aid and development is essentially that which reduces poverty through locally driven partnerships based on shared accountability for sustainable results and with aid delivered in a way that minimises transaction costs and strengthens local systems and capabilities (Mosse, 2005). Aid effectiveness principles of partnership, local ownership and mutual accountability have been heralded as a new era in development cooperation. This has facilitated a reordering of aid relationships and, inevitably, new labels—donors and recipients are now called 'development partners' who are mutually accountable for results. A focus on technical skills transfer and infrastructure development has been supplanted by capacity building and institutional strengthening. Project documents and log-frames are now recast into partnership or cooperation agreements, and new modalities of aid such as budget support and sector-wide approaches have become more commonplace.

These trends were clearly visible in Solomon Islands generally, and the education sector specifically. Two donors, New Zealand (NZ) and European Union (EU), introduced a SWAp in 2003/04 including sector budget support from NZ. The SWAp was in part framed as a response to the public service capacity deficits and perceived lack of accountability of local actors for development. Simultaneously however, the SWAp was strongly embedded within

the aid effectiveness discourse emphasising local ownership, use of local systems and empowering local change agents as the solution to development challenges (Ward, Banks and Sikua, 2005; Coxon and Tolley, 2011). Connected to this was a desire from both 'sides' to shift from a transactional relationship between donor and recipient focused on inputs and outputs, to a higher-level policy dialogue between mutual partners. As such, at that time in Solomon Islands the discourse of the SWAp reoriented relationships and, therefore, subjectivities. Significant in the establishment of the SWAp was the sense of a new beginning and the existence of 'change agents' within both Solomon Islands and the donor community. The Permanent Secretary for MEHRD at the time, Dr Derek Sikua, was one of the SWAp's chief architects and his presence as a 'change agent' was crucial to donors' willingness to enter the partnership. This also coincided with a new era in aid in NZ, where NZAID had recently been established as a semi-autonomous body dedicated to the management of aid with the focus on partnerships and building local ownership. Therefore, NZAID as the lead donor for the SWAp and Sikua as Permanent Secretary shared the sense that "there has got to be a better way" (Sikua quoted in Pederson and Coxon, 2009, p.8) than the previous project-focused, advisor heavy approach of aid in the Solomon Islands' education sector. From the start, the particular relationship between NZ and MEHRD was pivotal to the SWAp, as Sikua (quoted in Pederson and Coxon, 2009) described:

> *Our experience encouraged us to identify which donors were more likely to work in ways that suit us through a SWAp arrangement. They [the donors] agreed to our request that they guide and lead [the ministry] to an extent but not overpower; let them learn from their mistakes (...) and provided really good technical advisors – a key ingredient of the SWAp success; we know who we want and they work for us (p.9).*

As can be seen from the above description of aid in the Solomon Islands education sector, aid discourse generates particular subjectivities for donors, technical advisers, and public servants, which appear to influence actors' approach to aid relationships. Situating this within the broader development discourse, political history of Solomon Islands, and key socio-cultural features, as outlined briefly above, aims to inform the reader's interpretation of interviews with selected MEHRD staff, which are presented next.

MEHRD DEPICTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL ROLES AND AID RELATIONSHIPS

Several key themes emerged from the interviews with MEHRD staff. This article focuses on two that are most pertinent to the question of strengthening education relationships and aid effectiveness in Oceania, specifically that:

- MEHRD staffs' subjectivities are multiple, diverse, and complex. Aid discourse and relationships influence MEHRD subjectivities but are not determinative and are not unitary or consistent in their effects; and
- MEHRD staffs' perceptions of, and therefore interactions within, aid relationships are diverse and highly contingent on personal relationships in which cultural empathy is most highly valued.

Aid discourse does not define professional subjectivities

The research findings strongly countered the claims of post-development literature of aid discourse as a monolithic power and determinative influence on the subjectivities of aid 'recipients'. While labels such as 'development partner' or 'counterpart' were salient in participants' descriptions of their professional self, they were certainly not the only, nor the most significant, subjectivity. The subjectivities of 'public servant' and 'educationalist' were the most prominent when asking participants about their sense of professional self.

"First thing that comes to mind is I'm a teacher…[ ]..but public servant still garem minim for mi. Whatever I do, I do it for the people, serve the people". (P10)

"…we in the Ministry of Education, and King George as well as Waimapuru, we are all of them. We are educationalists, we are public servants, we are civil servants. Sometimes we do a little bit of private sector work". (P8)

"Servant of the public - with the focus on service". (P7)

Similarly, while relationships with aid-funded technical advisers (TA) and donor agencies were at times highlighted as playing an important role in participants' professional lives, they were by no means the most important. Relationships with colleagues, with family, with politicians, and with communities appeared to more strongly influence participants' professional subjectivities than aid relationships.

"I felt for my other colleague directors. Because when I see them, they sort of encouraged me more, because you see the management of the SWAp a number of them responsible for millions…….they themselves, they were doing all the work and they need somebody to support them....So I got some comfort from them……. to work together with them". (P3)

"We had our experience, and our experience up to the bush school – people still talk about us, even now, they say 'those fellas in the office, they never come to our school, but you people came'". (P9)

"I'm proud of the Ministry… we are leading other Ministries". (P7)

Participants' responses also highlighted the multiplicity of subject positions that they identified with and notably the frequent dissonance between them. Most often this was expressed in terms of tensions between family/village obligations and that of public service, such as in the following quote:

"But I think, that's where my view of being a public servant is very important to me……I don't use my position to benefit my, just my province, or my

school and my village. I tell you I've been in the Ministry for 22 years, and I feel very guilty, because I haven't done much for my school in my village. But that's being a public servant. You don't use your authority or your position to benefit yourself or your family". (P1)

This reflects the broader tensions between aid discourse and *kastom* highlighted earlier in this article. Participants also often talked of an internal conflict created by the negatively perceived actions and attitudes of some Solomon Islanders (in particular relating to corruption or perceptions of poor work ethic) and their own subjectivity as a Solomon Island public official working in the name of national development. The tension between professional and personal subjectivity also arose in this context, and the perceived lack of separation between professional and personal roles within Solomon Islands was typically expressed as a negative in comparison to the way of 'developed' nations.

That's what I mean by that there is no difference between a person's professional life and personal. You know in the Western world there's a very big difference - you don't mix personal life and professional life. There is a very big distinction".

***Q:** So would you like to see that change in Solomon Islands?*

"Yeah, that is that is….only then can we move, can we improve. In all the things, in terms of, even from down up to the highest level". (P1)

"The donors are probably thinking, oh, why are we giving aid money to these people if they can afford to pay such a ridiculous amount of money to MPs spouses…." (P6)

"…because being a Solomon Islander I am obliged to be a little bit more culturally sensitive towards my colleagues". (P6)

Many of the participants interviewed keenly felt this dissonance. It was also often a feature of my interpersonal relationships—I frequently experienced a sense of dissonance between donor characterizations of Solomon Island public servants and my personal experience of my MEHRD colleagues. There was a strong sense of liminality for participants in terms of being at once a Solomon Islander and therefore my 'other', while at the same time positioning themselves as distinct from 'those' Solomon Islanders who did not share the same developmental and 'modern' views that I held or represented an aid worker.

The prominence of this dissonance and sense of multiple subjectivities can, in part, be made sense of in the context of Melanesian notions of self-hood. While care must be taken to not generalise and to recognise that culture is always evolving, there are evident patterns in Melanesian notions of self-hood, which have a bearing on inter-personal relationships (Moore, 2008; Brigg, 2009b; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo, 2002; McDougall, 2000). Melanesian concepts

of self-hood tend to be of a strongly relational nature: the self is bound to others rather than existing as a distinct entity (Brigg, 2009b; Harrison 2006). Importantly, however, this relational self-hood is in part maintained through constant contact with other groups, during which difference is articulated and emphasised (Brigg, 2009b). As such, there is a continual tension for Solomon Islanders between relationality and individuality, 'sharedness' and differentiation, and this tension "is central to the lived experience of most people" (Harrison, 2007, p. 66 quoted in Brigg, 2009b, p. 151). Further, it is argued that Melanesian concepts of self-hood are very accepting of co-existing multiple identities and affiliations, overlapping and existing together even if at times conflicting (Brigg, 2009b). These notions of self-hood were not always shared by the aid actors with which MEHRD staff were interacting. This was highly evident in the participants' responses as well as in my own experience as an aid worker in Solomon Islands, and represents an important feature to consider in terms of creating effective aid relationships.

Perceptions and experiences of aid relationships are diverse and contingent

Participants revealed similar diversity and complexity in their articulation of their relationships with aid actors and their experiences of fulfilling roles such as 'counterpart' or 'development partner.'

"I can say yes with the SWAp. Partners - you can relate it to a husband and wife. They share everything, and they communicate with each other, and if they don't communicate there's a problem, in their relationship. Just the same, we can relate the partnership with the Ministry and our stakeholders…[ ]…" (P6)

"Well, no. Definitely not. It [referring to relationships with donors] is not. Partnership is something that there must be understanding between all the partners…." (P2)

"They [technical advisers] feel they are not answerable to me". (P7)

"…there's that feeling of you know, they bring in their money and they'd rather run it. So OK, run it. And then when you're done, then go away". (P6)

While often participants employed binary categories of 'us and them', such as "those TA", "the donors", and "the whitefella" they also emphasised the personal nature of their relationships with aid actors, and the importance of interpersonal connections that go beyond such stereotypes. My own reflections on my subjectivity in relation to MEHRD staff also supported this finding. At times I occupied the position of aid donor and was often referred to as "NZAID", "our development partner" or even "the bank". Yet at other times my engagements with my MEHRD colleagues operated on a much more personalized basis. This indicates the continual negotiation between multiple subjectivities and multiple discourses. Clearly, individuals matter. Yet at the same time, the labels and categories of donor, technical adviser, and foreigner equally mattered and were employed by MEHRD staff to make sense of and

order their aid relationships and their own position within those relationships.

Cultural empathy, trust, and not assuming they (donors or technical advisers) have all the answers were repeatedly highlighted by participants as critical to good relationships with them and, importantly, to participants' own professional motivation. What Solomon Islands MEHRD staff most valued in relationships with technical advisers and donors were encouragement, promoting a sense of self-belief, and professional support in the form of coaching or mentoring, rather than explicit instruction or one-way 'transfer of knowledge'.

"…what I feel is that hem more like, they adapt to the Solomon Islands context and culture, and they develop us from that basis". (P5)

"Like, I've had some really bad experiences with some of these TA's who just think that you know, who just do not even try to understand, you know, why something is that way…..but then I thought 'Oh. This is my office, this is my country. They're only here for three years. So I'm not going to allow them to' And I think that kind of thinking sort of, kept me going….the one characteristic that really went up my nose, was that they still had that idea that, oh white man ia, and very condescending". (P6)

This also aligns with the high value Solomon Islands' culture and society place on relationships and with the relational sense of self-hood highlighted above. This may not be true of other aided contexts, and points to the importance of cultural context for understanding subjectivity in aided relationships and the operations of discourse.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the combination of analysis of political and cultural features of Solomon Island society, empirical evidence of perspectives of MEHRD officials and reflection on my own professional experience, this article has sought to demonstrate the complex, dynamic and multi-faceted nature of aid relationships and subjectivities in the Solomon Islands education sector. A key conclusion from this research is that the effects of aid discourse on relationships and subjectivities are neither unitary nor consistent. Rather, the effects are conditional on the particular interactions amongst actors, within particular contexts with particular histories. The diversity and variability of participants' narratives illustrates this, as did my own experience.

To assume these relationships are determined by some all-powerful discourse of aid is to ignore the power of every-day interactions of people in particular contexts. These findings demonstrate that discourse is not determinative, and that subjectivities are multiple and dynamic (Baaz, 2005; Crewe and Harrison, 1998). Thus, to explain the emergence of the education SWAp in Solomon Islands as an example of the imposition of global agendas of aid effectiveness is inadequate. Rather, the emergence of the SWAp is more accurately understood as an outcome of a convergence of several discourses and circumstances, and an outcome that has continued to evolve in particular ways due to the complex subjectivities, relationships and discursive fields operating in Solomon Islands at the time (Tolley, 2012).

The accounts of the participants and my own experience within education-aid relationships not only demonstrate that context and history matter, but that they are created and re-created mutually, in and through, discourse and relationships. As Dilley argued, context is "a process or set of relations, and not a thing in itself" (Dilley 1999:5). As such, the value of this research is not simply to put aid into context but to show how aid's actor-networks make their context (Latour 1996, p. 133 cited in Mosse 2005, p. 17). The findings highlight the centrality of subjectivity and of inter-personal relationships for aid effectiveness. Reflecting on Hau'ofa's (1998, p.401) call for an Oceanic regional identity built around "human beings with a common heritage and commitment, rather than as members of diverse nationalities and races", the findings demonstrate the potential for aid effectiveness focused on relationships that are based on real interests, commonalities, differences and a recognition of agency.

This is not to suggest that simply having a personal relationship can remove the barriers created by perceptions of difference nor neuter the, at times, enormous power inequities involved in relationships between aid actors. Rather, it is argued that personal relationships, with critical reflection on those relationships, can help to move beyond these differences and the labels that work to reify difference. Doing so also gives greater recognition of agency in terms of the productive, generative nature of power. Aid does not make and unmake subjects, and aid discourse does not exclusively define nor determine reality, unless we as aid actors allow it to. For actors involved in education-aid relationships the challenge is to accept the dissonance that inevitably arises from critical reflection on simplistic binaries and reifications of difference, and use it to motivate deeper understanding and appreciation of self and other.

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Who is my neighbour? Unleashing our postcolonial consciousness

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It is all too easy to be discouraged, indeed, outraged, by the continuing state of socio-economic inequality and the fragility of 'the neighbourhood' (our world) in a deteriorating, conflict-ridden environment. As educators, we struggle with the perceived lack of educational quality, relevance, and ethics of policy and practice. Education systems tend to reflect the political ideologies of the day, many of which are socially and economically divisive and hostile to equitable change. It is crucial to condemn, in the strongest manner, current racist, separatist, and discriminatory views that tend to permeate our social media space, affecting public attitudes.

Comparative and international education theorists and practitioners can play a crucial role in critiquing, through the lens of critical postcolonial awareness, such socio-political constructions of society and education. The observations made in this article refer in particular to comparativists in Oceania, a region containing both large economies such as Australia, and small Pacific island states. This paper sets out an argument for 'unleashing our global postcolonial consciousnesses' to effect change, acting with non-violence and empathy in an intercultural, ethical, and actionable space (Ermine, 2007; Sharma-Brymer, 2008).

Keywords: postcolonial comparative and international education, postcoloniality, postcolonial consciousness, intercultural communication, ethics, justice

INTRODUCTION

My call for unleashing our postcolonial consciousness is a call to each of us to "go beyond the politics of society into the politics of individual consciousness" (Thaman, 2003, p.1) to help create a more realistic and liveable world of the future. The call stems from several decades of studying, teaching and trying to practise authentic, ethical, intercultural communication in the

face of seemingly implacable divisive worldviews based on racism, religious intolerance, and a spectrum of fear and ignorance of otherness. The call comes as we are still, in the 21st Century, experiencing a continuing state of socio-economic inequality and fragility inherited from the century just passed. Through neglect and lack of reasonable remedial action, we are simultaneously experiencing a deteriorating, sometimes poisoned environment. The planet is reeling from the destructive forces of neglect, misuse, and misappropriation.

Education systems tend to reflect the political ideologies of the day, many of which are socially and economically divisive and hostile to equitable social change. The emphasis in schools is often on school-based, national, and international testing and ranking, merciless daily assessment practices, and a neglect of social education. Fortunately this tendency has many exceptions in Oceania with increased emphasis on teacher quality, language diversity, quality of learning, and indigenous research methodologies (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Maebuta, 2011; Puamau, 2001). The pressure on smaller states in Oceania to conform to larger regional island states and international ranking systems weighs heavily, however. The question asked is how can Oceanic educators actively research and engage in a dialogue that will draw upon the strengths of current innovation, the strengths of increased access to global communication, and the strengths of scholarly theoretical deliberation?

Following this introduction, Section Two of the article explores the concepts implied by the question raised in the title of this paper: Who is my neighbour? Within this section, I take the stance that whether we come from dominant majority countries or from the colonised smaller states, we are all affected by the historical exploitation of the resources of colonised neighbourhoods, and, at the same time, to the exploitation of peoples who came under the rule of the powerful dominant colonisers. I comment in particular on the dilemmas of legislating a language of instruction with reference to the politics of language in pre- and post-colonial contexts.

Section Three investigates the impact of applying a postcolonial lens to global issues and personal values. The section starts with a detailed discussion of the 'politics of indignation' (Mayo, 2012) and the role of social media in creating or reflecting change. While it is heartening to see so many calls for action through social media, and the subsequent strength of public opinion that leads to positive change, it is also outrageous and saddening to see alongside

the thoughtful voice of the concerned, a seam of racist, separatist, and discriminatory views that permeate that social media space. Such views can only exacerbate the cruel treatment of perceived 'outsiders' such as refugees and asylum seekers, the marginalised minorities within nations, and the many groups who might be dismissively located in the colonial mind as the 'other' and 'not us'. The growth and impact of postcolonial consciousness to repudiate such binary concepts concludes this section.

Section Four sets out ways of 'unleashing our global postcolonial consciousness' in the field of education to effect change, acting with non-violence and empathy in an intercultural (Fox, 2014), ethical (Ermine, 2007) and actionable space (Sharma-Brymer, 2008). This section continues the themes of neighbours, neighbourhoods, and the personal and political constructions of space: borders, border crossings, and personal boundaries. Robertson, a key theorist on globalisation, spatial politics and education, has emphasised that "we need to focus on bordering processes as they have worked on, through, and are constitutive of, new social and political relations and identities, including society-state relations and claims and enactments of citizenship" (Robertson, 2011, p.282).

Section Five, by way of summary and conclusion, reiterates the need for a dialogue that will draw upon the strengths of current innovation, the strengths of increased access to global communication, and the strengths of scholarly theoretical deliberation*?* I re-emphasise the potential impact of the public intellectual in engaging in public discourse in the 21st Century.

RE-IMAGINING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Who is my neighbour? Is it the person living next door? Yes, of course. Is it one who for me and my family is an empathetic person*?* Yes, even at a distance, I would call them my friend and my neighbour. Is *any* fellow human being my neighbour, in the biblical sense of 'love thy neighbour as thyself'*?* Yes, it applies to those who profess to follow both Christianity and Judaism. A spiritual connection with our fellow human being is the base of most religions, including Islam. Buddhist wisdom is similar. Is my neighbour also my enemy? My personal undoing? Or perhaps one whom I feel comfortable about subjugating, or torturing, exploiting*?* My rival*?* Yes, they may be neighbours, but we would hardly describe our behavior and attitudes in such cases as 'neighbourly'. Given such disparities of approach, it is assumed in

this article that the neighbourhood can be re-imagined as one where relationships are considered from an ethical standpoint, where social and interpersonal networks can co-exist peacefully. As Epeli Hau'ofa (1993) stated in his well-known paper, *Our Sea of Islands*, he saw Oceania as "a world of social networks that criss-cross the ocean" (p.147). He envisaged a future that is respectful of our relationships with our regional neighbours.

Who is my neighbour? How do we communicate?

In the region of Oceania, several groups of islands tend to be grouped together as Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia, together with the larger islands to the south of New Zealand and Australia. New Zealand is also a Polynesian country. Demographically, the populations of the Pacific Islands have vast ocean distances to cross inside their own national boundaries (e.g. Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Cook Islands) or from one island nation to another. Most have one or more indigenous languages with the Melanesian countries of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu being per capita the most linguistically diverse in the world. With one or two exceptions the countries of Oceania have been colonised at some point in their history. Most Pacific Islands have since gained their independence, the first being Western Samoa (now Samoa) in 1962 with others following through the 1970s and 1980s. A few are still under French rule (for example, New Caledonia), or are in a legal relationship with the USA (for example, American Samoa and Guam).

Given that all have a common border of the ocean, the concept of a regional neighbourhood is easy to comprehend. Distance, together with language, however, can make for very distant cousins: neighbours in the minds of some; strangers in the minds of many. With the colonisation of much of the Pacific, and the introduction of European-style schools, so the introduction of non-indigenous languages had the eventual impact of colonising the mind, creating a dissonance between the 'superior' introduced language and the assumed 'second-class' mother tongues. However, indigenous ways of knowing still inform life in many Pacific countries, and from early childhood to higher education, indigenous ways of knowing are encouraged in programmes and classes, research and practice. Although there existed the potential for Eurocentric knowledge to swamp indigenous ways of knowing, skewing the culture of communication, and changing the ways in which the 'neighbourhood' interacted, the

groundswell of indignation over such a skewed way of knowing is evident in the following recent observation by Tongan author, Manu'atu:

> *Tongan cultural practices through stories, arts, performance, poetry, and songs are not only specific to the Tongans but are similar to those of other indigenous peoples….The task for Kakai Tonga Tu'a is to draw from our own Tongan language and cultural practices, and from other indigenous peoples' knowledge and ways to promote and advance our voices, rights, and visions. (Manu'atu, 2016 Facebook)*

Oceania and language of instruction

The choice of language of instruction is a crucial and emotional issue where states and regions comprise multi-ethnic, multi-lingual populations, as it is the case in Oceania. Language as much as any aspect of social history is a key postcolonial lens through which to survey social change.

Language defines what stories we hear, what stories we remember, and how our neighbours perceive each other. Adichie (2009) a Nigerian public intellectual and acclaimed international author, spoke at a TED talk about 'the single story' and how constant, simplified, stereotyped stories of 'the other' tend to define what we believe." She says: "Stories matter…stories can be used to empower and to humanise. Stories (about the other) can break the dignity of a people, but stories also repair that broken dignity" (TED talk, TED Global, July). Adichie's award winning fiction work has strong themes of social justice, cultural inequality, racism, and gender equity (Adichie, 2007, 2013).

The language of the colonists was introduced into the subjugated lands. Schools were built replicating traditional European models. Children were dressed in 'uniforms', and the curricula of the missionary schools and those set up by colonial administrations were steeped in the ways of knowing and religions of the colonising countries. With independence in the mid to late twentieth century, the movement to reconcile the traditional, local ways of knowing with the now common European knowledge accelerated, with newly installed and elected local leaders extolling new ways of viewing their countries, new ways of relating to the world.

In Samoa, the first Pacific Island country to gain independence in 1962, both Samoan language and English were continued as languages of instruction. The pattern was repeated in other countries, although in multi-lingual countries such as Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu (the latter having Francophone as well as Anglophone schools) the debates over the use of local languages as classroom languages and how to provide sufficient resources continue.

In newly independent African countries such as Tanzania (1961) and Kenya (1963), the language of instruction moved away from the colonial English towards Ki-Swahili. A Kenyan 'public intellectual', Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose name became a symbol for postcolonial language theory, published what became a classic work, *Decolonising the Mind* (Ngugi, 1986). It was a thesis of the tyranny of colonial languages that colonised the mind, which turned away from the wisdom of local knowledge. Ngugi, now nearly 80 years old, remains a literary and social activist whose work shaped the early structure for studies of postcolonialism which linked decolonisation and language use. The recent quote from a Samoan writer shows how this linkage is kept alive:

> *Legends and stories connect me to the past, to my ancestors. They are the thread that transcends time and space and I'm trying to pass that sense on to my own children by doing the same, telling them stories and teaching them songs. Our rule is to speak as much Samoan at home as possible as language is such a critical aspect of transmitting knowledge (*Figiel, *Rethinking Pacific Island Research, 3 May, 2016).*

Beyond the everyday use of the mother tongue, the growth of Pacific Studies in the higher education sector has been a significant journey, influenced to a great extent by a number of influential scholars from Pacific Island nations, including Wendt (from Samoa) and Thaman (from Tonga). Professor Thaman, a UNESCO Chair of Teacher Education and Culture, observed:

> *For me, decolonising Pacific studies is important because (1) it is about acknowledging and recognising the dominance of western philosophy, content and pedagogy in the lives and the education of Pacific peoples; (2) it is about valuing alternative ways of thinking about our world, particularly those rooted in the indigenous cultures of Oceanic peoples; and (3) it is*

> *about developing a new philosophy of education that is culturally inclusive and gender sensitive (Thaman, 2008, p. 3).*

In spite of this wide movement away from the colonial languages, English remained the language of use among the elite and the aspiring elite, and is still the focus for 'modern' education of the majority in secondary schools and on the path to higher education and employment in the business sectors. Moreover, Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific is increasingly under threat. The struggle for relevant postcolonial indigenous studies continues. Lameta wrote a decade ago:

> *Developmentally, such issues have provided the triggers that bring us to language determination, a reappraisal of our linguistic, socio-political, and economic environment (Lameta 2005, p.50).*

The debate continues today, as was made clear during the *Language in Education* symposium in Vanuatu in October 2015, in conjunction with the OCIES conference. From the presentations made at the symposium from various countries in Oceania, it is evident English is again becoming of prime importance in both primary and secondary levels of education, not least because of the ongoing pull of participating in international language and mathematics testing protocols.

A productive movement that has been developing for decades is the impetus to develop bilingual studies (Pacific Studies Research Center, 2010; Burnett, 2008, 2013). Bilingualism or trilingualism has been encouraged particularly where there are multiple local languages and dialects, for example in Papua New Guinea. Nevertheless, there have been some criticisms of how a bilingual program may be implemented in schools without having the resources to train quality teachers who proficiently speak both a local language and English (McLaughlin, 2011, p.90).

Oceania and comparative and international education

> *When an elder dies, a library is burned, and throughout the world, libraries are ablaze (Lindsey 2016 May 3, Facebook post).*

The opportunities to develop a more specific Oceanic field of comparative and international education have been both symbolically and practically enhanced by the decision to change the name of the *Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society* (ANZCIES) to the *Oceania Comparative and International Society* (OCIES). The change of name points to a recognition that Australian and New Zealand comparativists dwell in and are part of the neighbourhood of Oceania, drinking from the same water so to speak. The decision brings a level of dialogue with educationists from Pacific countries which previously has not been easy to establish or maintain. Only a small percentage of scholars from the Pacific islands are represented in the journals of education in Australia, for instance, let alone in the USA or Europe. Tuhiwai-Smith, a scholar from New Zealand who has been instrumental in bringing an awareness of Maori research to the New Zealand context, has been a long-time advocate of research undertaken by scholars from the Pacific:

> *When Indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, and people participate on different terms (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p.193)*

This is not to say that scholars from the Pacific should be consigned to speak only on behalf of themselves and their neighbours. As a reminder, Wesley-Smith, who was a guest editor for a special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific* (Wesley-Smith, 2016) on Pacific Studies, explains the changes over recent decades, changes from studying Pacific Islands peoples as laboratory objects of study toward a greater emphasis on issues of "positionality, research ethics and the politics of knowledge" (p. 153).

Together with other Pacific partners, comparative and international education researchers are key players in the conceptualisation of globalisation, regionalisation, regionalism and local concerns (Lee, Napier & Manzon, 2014). To place my argument in the context of international and comparative education, the stance of the *World Council of Comparative Education Societies* (WCCES), regarding its roles in promoting equity and representation among its constituent societies and activities, is in keeping with the concept of a new regionalism and a new global configuration. As OCIES is one of some 40 comparative education societies in the WCCES, there is a need to embrace not only a 'Western' international focus, but to embrace

ways of knowing that are equally international from the perspective of the Oceanic region. Unfortunately, marketization of education by the dominant 'West', "competes with values of cultural integrity and the local construction of knowledge…. Competing cultural values and the threat of exclusion for marginalised groups are often the driving forces behind resistance" (Fox, 2008, p.19).

As well as emphasising the urgent need for critical postcolonial awareness among educators everywhere, this article maintains that educational reform and constructive change within the wide boundaries of Oceania requires ethical and relevant research-based action, that for the comparative educationist researcher in the Pacific, the research approach itself is crucial:

> *We must design research strategies that are grounded in Indigenous and Native epistemologies… Outsiders have ignored or made light of the idea that Pacific Islands cultures have philosophies in part because our knowledge was oral rather than written until very lately – yet philosophy predates literacy (Gegeo, 2001, pp.503-4).*

The newly formed *Oceania Comparative and International Education Society* is a welcome impetus for creating the spaces for additional and emerging collaborative scholarly activity.

THE POSTCOLONIAL LENS

This section begins with the story of an internationally acclaimed singer-songwriter from Australia, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, a member of the Gumatj clan on Elcho Island, Yolngu country, off the central northern Australian coast (Hillman, 2013). He epitomises one of the best-known examples of the intersection of indigenous music and Western influence. I first heard his music, sung in Gälpu, one of the languages of the Yolngu country, on the radio in 2008. This was Gurrumul's voice and song before he was 'claimed' and 'changed' by the intervention of the Western musical industry. The sheer beauty and spirituality of voice and sound made an enormous emotional impact on me. This blind musician, composer, guitar player, singer of what is sacred, has now been lauded nationally and internationally. His message is of identity, spirit and connection, coming from deep within. And yet, something has changed

In Western circles Gurrumul has now been named "an enigma", a "unique celebrity". Since his fame has spread far beyond Elcho Island, he has 'adapted' some of his singing to a more easily recognisable Western folk style over the past few years, even though his voice still mesmerises. One reviewer has noted that:

> *Gurrumul has changed the way people listen to and experience his Yolŋu cultural world through* an accessible Western music style *(my emphasis) (skinnyfishmusic.com.au).*

It seems that unless the representative of the 'other' somehow adapts, she/he cannot be considered 'accessible'. His biographer Hillman states that Gurrumul is blind, but the thing that singles Gurrumul out, "is not his blindness but innate musical savvy, his hunger to make melodies to fill the air with what he can imagine" (Hillman, 2013, p.12) Somehow 'filling the air with melodies' does not feel sufficient as a way to describe such a spiritually gifted person. There seems a naivety in another comment by the same biographer:

> *Gurrumul performs in English on occasion, but the full vigour of his voice is only revealed when he sings in his mother tongue. Maybe he feels a greater confidence in the meaning of words shaped in Gälpu, but I think it's also to do with the sheer love of the language he's used since infancy (Hillman, 2013, p. xix)*

Here there is a disruption of meaning: the vigour of his voice is not about confidence but about meaning that cannot be easily translated. It is clear that the words of a piece of music cannot easily be translated into another tongue, or that words can be found that adequately fulfil the spiritual intention of the composer (and see Niranjana, 1992, where she discusses translation as disruption in a postcolonial context). It is through this example of Gurrumul's music, his representation of culture and meaning, that postcolonial theory can be understand at a personal level.

The impact of postcolonial theory

Without spending too much time on the historical development of postcolonial theory, which has been well described elsewhere over the last few decades (as has globalisation), postcolonialism is a useful way to describe the impact on societies of movements of people to

and from former colonies, and to analyse the consequences in a global context of power and domination, economic privilege, political resistance and the emergence of the subaltern voice (Spivak, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Hickling-Hudson et al, 2004; Fox, 2012). Postcolonial theory problematizes individual experience of otherness, disrupts the preconceptions of what a hegemonic society may construe as development, growth, or what is equitable trade and aid in the globalised world.

The postcolonial condition applies beyond the historical post-independence literature, to a theoretical exploration of contexts where interculturality can be problematized or celebrated. In an article on postcolonialism and education, Rizvi et al. (2006) say that "critical education practice is a postcolonial aspiration" (p. 260). The article, though written only ten years ago, seems still to be missing the point of where the postcolonial gaze lies: the authors are looking at postcolonial issues as drawn along a one-way colonial path from centre to periphery. As the 21st Century progresses, such a linear view of borders and bordering is increasingly being conceptualised along different spatial trajectories (Robertson, 2011, p.284).

Today, the exploitation of, or discrimination against, the 'other' comes from both within and beyond national borders. We have un-bordered the world through global financial transactions; we have re-bordered the world into spheres of wealth and poverty. We have un-bordered the world through social media; we have separated and re-bordered the world through war and conflict, through religious extremism and political mayhem. From an Australian point of view, for example, the postcolonial critique applies to a nation of indigenous peoples, former colonists and the 'nation of immigrants' from all parts of the world who have settled in the country. Thus it is appropriate to talk about education in postcolonial terms and disrupt the discourse of 'otherness' (Fox, 2008b, p.13).

In the Pacific Islands arena, where the majority of citizens are indigenous to their countries, postcolonial theory is a useful way to analyse the political, ethical and moral considerations of the interplay between the larger Western countries and the small island states (Thaman, 2009). Critical postcolonial theory allows researchers to explore the interplay of unequal power and different knowledges in context; it provides a stage for those who look beyond the claims of those in power.

The politics of indignation

Waves of indignation are increasingly felt by those who have been marginalised in society by ethnicity, language, culture, gender, disability, poverty, or indeed in the politics of power. Today such expression takes many forms, particularly through social media, including mass movements and public demonstrations of indignation as witnessed in the last decade (for example, throughout the "Arab Spring", when governments were toppled). Mayo, a postcolonial theorist based in Malta, has given an extensive review of the "politics of indignation" in his insightful monograph of the same name: *The politics of indignation: imperialism, postcolonial disruptions and social change* (Mayo, 2012). His outspoken views on the political basis of education, his searching questions on race, migration, the dynamics of political control, and other matters make him a key writer of the 21st Century on the state of the world as it appears to descend into chaos, conflict and conservative backlash.

Mayo critiques neoliberalism and the state, as many have done, noting the perils of an ideology of the market place. He explains how imperialism has not disappeared with the gaining of independence of former colonies. He describes how postcolonial theory and practice operates to disrupt the colonial agenda, and how social change is possible. His examples range from the 1959 revolution in Cuba, to the African wars of independence of the 1960s, and to Chile in the early 1970s. There are lessons to be learned from these movements that brought so much promise. Mayo also places Brazilian educator Freire in the category of disruptors of hegemonic power; Freire's well known thesis on conscientization of the oppressed to obtain freedom is a predecessor of postcolonial theory in education (Freire, 1970).

The expression of outrage and indignation tends to erupt where there is a tipping point of public opinion leading to mass demonstrations, uprisings and violence. Mayo says, in the cases of the uprisings of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2010-2011: "In all cases the tipping point for what would become a mass broad-based revolution was the circulation of a compelling story of the humiliation, abuse and flagrant flouting of rights of a fellow citizen" (Mayo, 2012, p. 79). He invokes the argument of Antonio Gramsci (1971), who wrote about the difference between spontaneity and 'conscious direction'.

The trajectory of uprisings is, however, less predictable. As Mayo says, "there are no guarantees in this politics of popular indignation and mobilisation…of who is giving

'conscious direction'" (ibid p. 44). This is where researchers, teachers and other intellectuals have roles to play in critiquing, supplying well researched information, and in listening to the voices of those who have no ready access to the public.

A key observation from Mayo is that the role of students in disrupting the forces of imperialism and dictatorships should never be underestimated. He says that:

> *…students have played a significant role in furnishing countries with a stream of public intellectuals…. Education institutional entities provide the opportunity for academics and students to join forces as public intellectuals and not only denounce university neoliberal reform, but also turn what is already a public issue (education as a public good) into a broader all-encompassing public concern (ibid. p. 52).*

Throughout his book, Mayo is exploring the politics of indignation, and the role of public intellectuals, students, and the public in bringing about social justice and change. There is a case to be made that the tools of the new social media have of themselves revolutionised the way we as individuals interact. And when a message 'goes viral', youth uprisings can seem to be spontaneous.

The postcolonial lens is a powerful tool through which both the powerful and the marginalised can view the globalised structures of borderless social and economic interactions and the dynamics of political control. Indignation by those who are not beneficiaries of globalisation, those who are disempowered, spills over and creates unrest, uprisings, demonstrations that create change. Beyond indignation, there is an urgency to undergo a shift in consciousness, as described in the next section.

UNLEASHING OUR GLOBAL POSTCOLONIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The language of postcolonialism, with its deep interpretations of societies in flux, has facilitated a necessary shift of consciousness. A combination of wisdom, knowledge and experience in postcolonial relationships is unleashing a new global wave of (nonviolent) struggle against injustice and neocolonialism which are once again raising their ugly heads.

Determination to strive for human rights and freedoms underlies a commitment to social justice, a commitment that, under certain circumstances, arouses passion, even fury.

It is time for public intellectuals to raise their voices and provide scholarly, passionate discussion about the chaos that is emerging from the disruptions in the Middle East, the millions of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Europe from Syria and other countries. It is time for speaking out from a moral and ethical perspective, by individuals reaching a heightened degree of consciousness of the failure of governments and military powers to deal humanely with the current diaspora. It is time to become conscious of the continuing poverty and societal breakdown of communities within nations, conditions that have been maintained through lack of authentic communication between the dominant and the powerless. Giroux has been espousing for decades the need for a critical transformational ethical arm of intercultural discourse; it is, he says, the principal role of the public intellectual (Giroux 2005, p.158). Two important areas of postcolonial consciousness are described below: the concept of Ethical Space, and of Actionable Space.

Intercultural Ethical space: a postcolonial perspective

Ermine (2007), ethicist and researcher with the Indigenous Peoples Health Research Centre in Canada, is a Cree from north central Saskatchewan. He has developed the conceptual notion of 'ethical space', a theoretical space between cultures and worldviews. The ethical space of engagement is a space to develop a framework for dialogue between human communities. Ermine defines ethics as "the capacity to know what harms or enhances the well-being of sentient creatures" (p.195). He claims that "with our ethical standards in mind, we necessarily have to think about the transgression of those standards by others and how our actions may also infringe or violate the spaces of others" (ibid). He talks about our basic personal boundaries, our moral thresholds, and the "sacred space of the ethical" (p.196). While his work concentrates on the positioning of Indigenous peoples and Western society, the 'space between' applies in other contexts, such as between asylum seekers and members of a Western established society who live in fear of their society being 'flooded' by unwelcome outsiders with different religious or other worldviews. In such circumstances, it would be well to explore Ermine's "sacred space of the ethical".

Ermine rightly points out that despite international agreements, treaties, or conventions regarding human rights, which should provide a measure of guidance, of legal obligations and so forth, the desired effective and peaceful communicative resolution of differences does not necessarily occur. In relation to the Canadian discourses around Indigenous and Western society, he notes that:

> *…what the legal instruments [in Canada] recognize is that Indigenous peoples are not the enemies of Canadian civilization, but are, and have always been, essential to its very possibility. The compelling legal task is to enable processes so that rights are justly named, described and understood (Ermine 2007, p.201).*

Although Ermine has stated that no framework has existed up until now to enable discussion and dialogue to happen between Indigenous-West relations, there are many points of theoretical connection between his desired communicative resolution, the ethical space of engagement, and the contribution of Habermas' Communicative Action Theory (Habermas 1984). While Habermas has moved on from his publications of the 1980s to acknowledge the shifts in knowledge production and knowledge dissemination globally, the essence of his theory remains significant.

Habermas posited a hypothetical 'as if' Ideal Speech Situation (ISS), coercion-free, in which interlocutors can develop a mutual understanding through a rational dialogic process (Fox 2007, 2012). In an Ideal Speech Situation, a counter factual context, interlocutors strive to meet a mutual understanding, not necessarily an agreement of action, but an understanding of meanings. Habermas maintained that, for *authentic* communication to take place, certain validity claims must be satisfied (Habermas 1984, p.99). In summary, Habermas' validity claims are that what the speaker is saying must be: true, as far as that person knows; truthful, or sincere; normatively appropriate, in terms of that person's understanding of cultural norms, and comprehensible to the other person.

These conditions need some clarification in an intercultural context. What is normatively appropriate for one interlocutor may be quite inappropriate for the other, regardless of whether they position themselves in the same culture or another. Therefore, some agreement must be forthcoming about what is appropriate in any specific communicative situation. Similarly,

comprehensibility is a loaded concept. Does this mean something greater than communicative competence if one party is not speaking their native language? Presumably so. Moreover, the definition of truth and truthfulness is within each person and interpreted through certain cultural modes of reasoning.

It follows that *claims* to authenticity are context bound even though they may be based on universal principles. Authentic communication and the ethical space of engagement, imply the opening of oneself to the full power of what the 'other' is saying. It is this potential which researchers in intercultural situations can celebrate. The unleashing of postcolonial consciousness requires researchers, writers, public intellectuals to find that ethical space and engage.

Actionable Space

The exploration of the idea of 'actionable space' evolved from an intensive research study by Sharma-Brymer (2007) on "being an educated woman". From her research with girls and women in India, Sharma-Brymer found that their experience of 'being educated' entailed different experiences between their internal and external space. In other words, differences between how they saw themselves from within (that is, their identity, their sense of wellbeing and agency), and how they saw themselves in the public sphere, for example as professional women, or mothers or community participants.

The women felt confident about being educated but their experiences revealed that the expression of that confidence varied in different contexts. The girls said they were better off educated in terms of being informed, and being more participative; however, there were tensions in their experience regarding inclusion, equality, rights, participation and capabilities. Sharmer-Brymer concluded that actual and metaphorical space in a woman's life entails an expression of agency in everyday lived experience, the assumed and the actual characteristic of an educated woman's life and how she could act in those spaces. She coined the term "Actionable Space", the ability to take action within a conflicting set of constraints.

Drawing upon this integrated meaning, the term Actionable Space provides a ground for the description of a space in which educated women are in a condition, a position, where they are capable of producing a desirable effect to alter their condition. They have power to act towards a change in their private and public domains of life. It is a space available to women for their

concerted action to renegotiate the boundaries of their lived world (Sharma-Brymer et al., 2008). Their 'being an educated woman' is the key with which they can effect a powerful renegotiation for a change as they desire. Thus, it is a conceptual space that has its value in an ideal [counterfactual] condition as well as an actual concrete space relating to an everyday expression of educated women's agency.

Their external experiences are located in the public systems of political, economic, social, cultural, religious environments. At the same time, they are negotiating the power relations and control by means of their inner strength, the space situated in the internal locations of their awareness of their self and identity and their social and cultural obligations.

The construct of actionable space resonates strongly with other ways of unleashing our postcolonial consciousness. It ties in with Ermine's ethical space. It contains a strong message for how the personal and the political can be intertwined not only in everyday life, but in what can be shared on social media and generally in the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have tried to present a viable way to re-imagine our neighbourhood and explore ways of re-negotiating intercultural exchanges that are not based on exploitation or domination. I have called for unleashing our postcolonial consciousness so that as educators we feel free to speak out publicly, in addition to our working within the academic genres in which we find comfort. In answering the question, 'Who are our neighbours?' I propose that educators from around the globe who share concerns of human rights, of the inclusiveness of postcolonial society, are our neighbours.

A pivotal concern in this paper has been to explore how educators and public intellectuals communicate, particularly in Oceania, in this 'sea of islands'. Eurocentric and traditional knowledges and ways of knowing are not necessarily binary opposites. Furthermore, that research led by those who are part of that research, rather than being researched by others (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), is a key to intellectual collaboration. It is important that within Oceania, in schools and other contexts for educating the young, the languages used are carefully and deliberately selected to be inclusive.

From a postcolonial lens, to the impact of postcolonial theory, to the politics of indignation, the paper has tried to make connections and build a framework for individual educationists, public intellectuals, to unleash their global postcolonial consciousness. As this article goes to press, the world is reeling from the diaspora of refugees and from the calls for social justice by those who are marginalised in their own societies. Comparative and international education theorists and practitioners can play a crucial role in critiquing, through the lens of critical postcolonial awareness, such socio-political constructions of society and education. There is today a move from critiquing to raising a storm of awareness, to unleashing a force for social change based on a firm consciousness of postcolonial ways of knowing.

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