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Acknowledging the importance of context: Researching education in small states

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The distinctive features of small states provide the focus for this special issue. Each paper explores issues of global significance that relate to curriculum and pedagogical reform, language and literacy policies, internationalising teacher education and research partnerships. Whilst small states are the context for the discussion of these issues, the papers offer insights that have wider application. Acknowledging the contextual features of small states can help elucidate the significance of multi-layered contextual factors in educational reform, and the ways in which global agendas have been mediated locally.

INTRODUCTION

This special issue explores educational initiatives across a diverse range of small states: the landlocked nation of Bhutan; the archipelago of the Maldives; the relatively new nation of Timor-Leste; and the Pacific nations of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. Whilst these nations have distinctive characteristics they all fit the categorisation of a 'small state' using the Commonwealth's definition of states that have a population of less than 1.5 million. As with any categorisation or label, it delineates, and as such, hides as much as it reveals. The six articles that comprise this special issue represent diverse contexts with a broad scope of geographic, political, economic and educational features. The articles, therefore, reveal the differences as well as the similarities of the 'small state' focus. Their distinctive agendas, priorities and challenges, do, however, emphasise 'a keen appreciation of the significance of context' and the need to do more to acknowledge the influence and impact of contextual factors and issues (Crossley, 2010, p. 422). Aligned with Crossley's view, this special issue explores the questions of *how small states engage with international agendas while dealing with their own set of circumstances, needs and priorities* and, simultaneously *how international researchers and practitioners engage in small states in ways that enable appreciation of context*.

The characteristics of small states demonstrate why contextual factors are so important, as their distinguishing characteristics mean they also face unique challenges. Furthermore, due to their size, small states tend to be outward looking and consequently tend to be policy importers (Brock & Crossley, 2013). Consequently borrowed policies need to be contextualised to suit their conditions and circumstances, highlighting how one size does not fit all and how what can be 'best practice in one context may not be appropriate elsewhere' (Crossley & Sprague, 2012, p. 35). Where policy borrowing has been successful it is because significant elements are shaped and incorporated within models of practice appropriate for the host culture (Elliott, 2014, p. 39).

This special issue seeks to generate discussion about: (i) contextualised understandings of 'best practice' and developing contextually appropriate approaches to education

reform; (ii) the role of education research in elucidating the tensions between global and local knowledge and perspectives; (iii) what larger states can learn from research in small states.

Each paper explores educational issues of global significance such as: language and literacy reform; navigating conflicting policy demands; promoting student wellbeing; implementing learner-centred pedagogy; the enduring effects of colonial legacies; internationalising teacher education; and the challenges of curriculum reform. In each case, there is emphasis on how global agendas are navigated locally.

In a contribution to this special issue Michael Crossley provides an overview of the formal acknowledgement of the needs of small states, outlining key developments since the 1980s. He has long drawn attention to particular ecology of small states (Crossley, 2010), which is a central theme in this issue. He articulates the need for contextual sensitivity in educational research globally and articulates the contribution that small states can make to the international community.

In different ways the various papers generate insights about how context matters – within culturally, socially and geographically diverse small states. The first two papers address reform at the school level and how this intersects within the wider system and policy environment. The second set of papers explores education initiatives through investigations centred on system level reform or multi-site studies, highlighting the multiple factors that are negotiated in this process. Exploring broader reflections on colonial influences and research collaboration in a small state context is the underpinning theme for the final paper.

Engaging at a local school level, Rhonda Di Biase explores the intersection of policy and practice in one island school within the highly-dispersed nation of the Maldives. This school is framed as a 'resilient school' in setting itself against the national trend and the problematic implementation of active learning reform within the Maldives. The school posed particular interest in its approach of going against the dominant narrative of widespread challenges of changing classroom practices in Maldivian classrooms. Therefore, the study provides insights into how this school negotiated to enact innovation within the Maldivian policy context. The study concludes with a series of design principles, providing insights for others intending to promote innovation and reform in related contexts.

Sangay Jamtsho's study is situated in Bhutan, a landlocked small state. He illuminates the intersecting and sometimes contradictory pressures that exist as Bhutanese schools navigate competing demands in seeking to promote a whole-school approach to student well-being. This focus on student well-being can be understood within the context of Bhutan's 2009 promotion of Gross National Happiness. Yet even in this context, conflicting pressures were identified as a barrier to reform. The need to embrace a shared meaning for change was highlighted as a necessary precondition for being able to promote student well-being in Bhutanese schools.

In taking up the idea of developing a shared vision, Rebecca Jesson and Rebecca Spratt report on a research practice partnership focused on enacting and studying the idea of co-designing literacy interventions in the Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme, which is funded under the New Zealand Aid Programme in three Pacific nations. The need for acknowledging the central place of context in aid assistance is explored not only for the purposes of promoting local voice and through that ownership

and sustainability, but also as an inevitable consequence of the theoretical frameworks that underpin learning.

Acknowledging the challenges in Timor-Leste and the specific needs this country has faced arising from its colonial past and its newly acquired independence, Laura Ogden investigates the tensions inherent in the new curriculum that aims simultaneously to internationalise and localise the new curriculum. The complex agenda of curriculum reform and the divergent visions of education make for a challenging reform process as tensions between global education policy and the localisation of national reform are navigated. These tensions are openly acknowledged and elaborated in this paper.

Renata Cinelli and Mellita Jones, tapping into the outward looking orientation of small states, explore the experience of Australian students in completing a practical teaching experience in the Solomon Islands. The 'openness' of many small states often results in longstanding relationships with larger, neighbouring states. With many students completing their teacher education studies outside of their home countries, this study has wider implications for teacher education in general. Their study also highlights the importance of highly personalised relationships in small states, evident in the longevity of this practicum relationship and the development of longstanding relationships between the institutions.

The final paper takes a step back, reflecting upon context from a broader perspective. Alex McCormick considers research agendas and related issues of ethics ownership and uses of knowledge, situated within decolonising discourses. Using the Vanuatu research moratorium as an opportunity for reflection, she considers the cultural, demographic, geographical, historical, linguistic, political and (post-) colonial features of this small state, and explores the complexities of collaborative investigations and knowledge production and sharing.

This issue, highlights the importance of recognising the influence of contextual factors in educational reform. While small states, may have distinctive needs and priorities, 'smallness' also has some advantages (Crossley & Sprague, 2012). It has the potential to illuminate the factors influencing education initiatives. What can be rendered more visible in a small state, or even a small island, has the potential to offer insights into larger questions. The implementation failure of many internationally driven educational initiatives (Crossley, 2010) focuses attention on the disparity between what is intended in policy and what happens in practice. As such, Brock and Crossley's (2013) contention that research on education in small states can help better understand and appreciate the significance of multi-layered contextual factors in educational reform provides an overarching focus. The degree of 'openness' or outward orientation of small states, which is explored through the research reported in this special issue, elaborates different approaches in how global agendas have been mediated locally.

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Foreword

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Professor Michael Crossley FRSA, FAcSS has kindly agreed to write a foreword for this collection of papers. Here he gives the context to the importance of research about education in small island states. He is Professor of Comparative and International Education and Director: Education in Small States Research Group at the University of Bristol (www.smallstates.net) and is also Adjunct Professor of Education, The University of the South Pacific.

Research specifically focussed upon education in small states dates back to the 1980s and the seminal work of Bacchus and Brock (1987; Brock 1984) for the Commonwealth Secretariat. With a majority of its member states being classified as small (those with less than 1.5 million people) the Commonwealth became a key supporter and advocate for focussed attention on their distinctive needs and aspirations. This generated collective action and provided tangible support in the form of regional, pan-Commonwealth and international meetings and workshops for small states, the production of dedicated materials and resources, and funds for research and development initiatives (Crossley and Holmes, 1999).

Much has been achieved since then, with the Commonwealth continuing to play a leading role, and UNESCO also pioneering work with a more focused grouping classified as small island developing states (SIDS). This consists of 52 SIDS that were initially recognised at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992 (UNDESA, 2007). In more recent times such work has become increasingly important given the special vulnerability of SIDS to the emergent challenges of environmental uncertainty created by the impact of climate change on rises in sea level, fresh water supplies and food security. Tuvalu in the Pacific and Maldives in the Indian Ocean, are, for example, both threatened by total inundation by a relatively small rise in sea levels.

The impact of such global challenges for education in small states was examined in work carried out for the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2009 (Crossley, Bray and Packer, 2011), and at a multidisciplinary conference held in 2014 at the University of Bristol on the theme of Environmental Uncertainty in Small Island States. At this meeting, convened by the Cabot Institute and Graduate School of Education, HE Dame Pearlette Louisy, Governor General of St Lucia in the Caribbean, delivered an influential Keynote Address titled 'Living at the Sharp End of Environmental Uncertainty in a Small Island Developing State'. In doing so, she called for greater efforts by the international community to engage in sustained partnerships with local agencies and personnel in dealing with the dramatic impact of global environmental challenges on small states (Louisy, 2014). More specifically, a strong case was made for education to do more to help address the economic and societal implications of such challenges, and for concerted efforts to be directed at the strengthening of indigenous research capacity in education and other strategic fields. Further details of these discussions, videos of the key presentations, and information on the follow on progress of a UN accredited 'Sharp End: SIDS Research Partnership and Capacity Building Network' that was launched at the Third International UN Conference on Small Island Developing States held in Samoa during September 2014, can be

found on the Cabot Institute website and at www.smallstates.net. In many respects, initiatives such as this are advancing the momentum of work on education in small states, and inspiring a new generation of researchers from and within such contexts worldwide.

This Special Issue of the *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* takes the field forward and adds to this momentum, and for these reasons I am especially pleased to support the work of the Special Issue Editor and the diverse contributors who are carrying out original research in small state contexts that range from the Pacific Islands of Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, to Bhutan, Timor-Leste and Maldives. This is an important initiative, and one that I hope will further inspire others from small states to lead and shape the direction of future research, including innovative, but more equal, partnerships with colleagues elsewhere (see also related arguments by Coxon and Cassity, 2011, in this journal). This is especially important in current times when pressures on government budgets are generating significant cuts to education and research, and even threatening to constrain the future role of the Commonwealth in maintaining its own direct engagement in education, and thus, in education in and with small states.

My own work, and that of the Education in Small States Research Group at Bristol, has long argued that if the distinctive educational needs and priorities of small states are to be addressed, the dominance of the 'one size fits all' thinking that characterises many international development agencies must be systematically challenged. So too must the hegemony of larger, richer nations, with different contextual and cultural realities, that are often wedded to Western values and neo-liberal ideological trajectories. Trajectories that may not be appropriate for the challenges faced by SIDS. This is not to say that education systems cannot learn from each other, but it is to highlight the limitations of a simplistic search for so called 'best practice'; to do more to challenge uncritical education policy transfer; and to recognise the importance of greater context sensitivity in educational research and development worldwide (Crossley, 2010).

More positively, it is argued that research on education in small states has much to offer the international community, as demonstrated by investigations long carried out on the problems faced by boys in schooling in the Caribbean (Miller, 1991), as we have already shown by contributions made to the climate change debate, by innovative approaches to education for sustainable development in the Pacific (see Koya Vaka'uta, Nabobo-Baba and Teadero, 2011) and given the increasingly acknowledged potential of small states to actively engage with the new global international development architecture and influence both the nature and implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This Special Issue makes a further and most welcome small state contribution to the international literature.

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Mediating global reforms locally: A study of the enabling conditions for promoting active learning in a Maldivian island school

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This paper explores active learning reform in the small state of the Maldives. Acknowledging the implementation challenges of active learning approaches globally, the study explored the policy-practice intersection by examining the experiences of one island school and its approach to promoting active learning pedagogy. The school was selected for its proactive approach to adopting innovation. Within the overarching methodology of design-based research, a study of the context was undertaken to investigate the enabling conditions for reform. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework, this paper considers factors within the school and island context that played an enabling role in the implementation of active learning pedagogy. Data were collected through interviews from key stakeholders within the school. The findings identified the following key features in developing a change-welcoming school: the role of school leadership in leading change; the importance of parent-school collaboration; the school's proactive approach to managing existing resources; and the critical role of leading teachers in providing classroom-based support. The findings were converted into design principles, an output of design-based research, that are intended as guidelines for others implementing similar reforms in related contexts.

Keywords: Small states; Maldives; education reform; active learning; design principles; school leadership

INTRODUCTION

The distinguishing features of small states highlight the necessity for greater attention to contextual and cultural factors in educational reform initiatives (Crossley, 2010). One prevalent reform is learner-centred education (LCE), which has found widespread currency across many developing and middle-income countries where traditional teaching practices remain entrenched. Yet the promotion of LCE, also referred to as active learning, has often made little inroad into changing classroom practices (Schweisfurth, 2011) from traditional transmission approaches to teaching. Amongst the well-documented challenges is the need for greater attention to contextual factors (O'Sullivan, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011). This need is brought into particularly sharp focus in small states, with their own distinctive educational ecology, yet have tended to be heavily influenced by increasingly powerful global paradigms of 'one-size-fits-all' educational policy (Crossley, 2010). Brock and Crossley (2013, p. 388) argue that it is the uniqueness of small states that draws attention to the limitations of a one size fits all approach and the need to 'appreciate the significance of multi-layered contextual

factors in educational development'. Consequently, small states provide a rich context for research on education reform by illuminating the tensions between global travelling reforms and local realities on the ground.

This paper examines the contextual influences on the enactment of active learning pedagogy in the Maldives, a small island state. It explores the policy-practice intersection by investigating the experiences of one island school in the small state of the Maldives. The paper begins by outlining some key features of the Maldives. It then provides an outline of design-based research (DBR) as the overarching methodology and reports the factors found to influence reform within the school. It concludes with a series of design principles, an output of DBR, that are intended as guidelines for others implementing similar reforms in related contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGING CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework provides a way of conceptualising how teacher practice is influenced by multiple layers of context (Figure 1). This nested model acknowledges that factors operating outside the immediate classroom setting impact the use of active learning methods by teachers inside the classroom. Consequently, active learning as an innovation can be analysed as part of a complex whole and thus 'enhanced or limited by the social ecology of the interacting systems' (Jónsdóttir & Macdonald, 2013, p. 276).

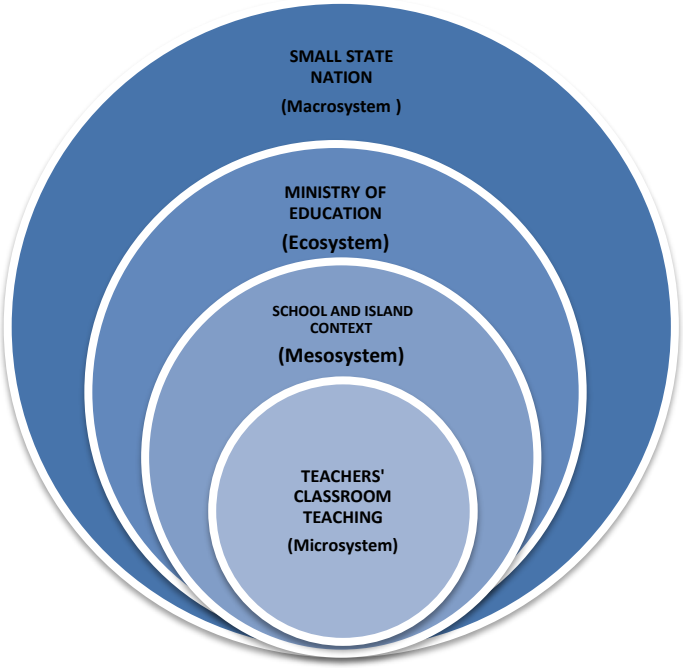

Figure 1: An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework representing levels of influence on classroom teaching

These layers are conceptualised as: the mesosystem (the school and local island context); the ecosystem (the Ministry of Education, representing the policy environment); and the macrosystem (the broader Maldivian society). As such, recognition is given to the multiple factors that influence the implementation of innovations in school settings (Jónsdóttir &

Macdonald, 2013). In sum, 'to implement active learning pedagogy, there need to be favourable contextual conditions' (Casale, 2010, p. 27).

THE MALDIVES CONTEXT

The 200 inhabited islands of the Maldives form part of an archipelago of 1,190 coral islands formed into 26 naturally occurring atolls. Most islands are small with an average area of 0.7km. The capital, Malé, an island of two square kilometres, has a population of approximately 120,000 people. These features mean the Maldives face particular vulnerabilities that are unique to the country. The most recent Human Development report of the Maldives (UNDP, 2014, p. 44) notes that:

> [t]he geographic and spatial dispersion of the population poses major challenges to policy-makers in the delivery of high qualities services such as education, health and other infrastructure such as power, at economical costs.

Small states have particular contextual features (Crossley, 2010), such as remoteness, small populations and a narrow resource base, and, therefore, face distinctive priorities and dilemmas. The particular challenges of small states mean they tend to be more outward looking, seeking innovative approaches beyond their borders to help exploit the slender resources they do have (Bacchus, 2008). As such, small states are usually 'takers' rather than 'makers' of world policies (Bacchus, 2008). Moreover, the geographic dispersion of the Maldives poses challenges for those providing education across the country. The spread of islands makes equitable distribution of resources difficult and services are heavily concentrated in the capital.

Every island has at least one primary school, so no-one is denied access to schooling. Yet islands face a vicious cycle in terms of education outcomes. Maldivians have a strong connection to the island of their birth (UNDP, 2014), therefore trained teachers tend to return to their islands to teach. Thus, schools with students that achieve stronger academic outcomes usually have more qualified teachers. Ahmed (1994, p. 29) asserts 'almost all atolls have "richer" and "poorer" types of schools created by this process' creating a self-perpetuating cycle for islands. Across the country, there is a shortage of qualified teachers, resulting in a costly reliance on expatriate teachers, mostly from India, who are employed to cover the shortfall. This difficulty with human resources is a recognised challenge for small island states (UNDP, 2014).

Implementing active learning in the Maldives

In a recent World Bank report (Aturupane & Shojo, 2012, p. 1), the successes and challenges of reforming education are summarised in the first paragraph:

> The country achieved the first-generation objective of providing universal access to basic education through rapid expansion of enrolment . . . the second generation challenge is to provide education of adequate quality. Evidence, from a variety of sources, shows that education quality in the Maldives is weak, and needs urgent attention.

Several challenges in the system have been identified: low educational attainment in O/A-level examination results; teacher demographics with a shortage of trained teachers; the reliance on expatriate teachers to meet this shortfall and the associated expense; and disparity between Malé and island schools with schools in the capital having better human and

material resources. Given the geographic and demographic constraints of the Maldives, these are major challenges (Aturupane & Shojo, 2012).

The Child Friendly School (CFS) project was initiated in 2002 to address the needs of the most disadvantaged in the country. Following the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, additional UNICEF funding resulted in a wider reach across the country. The CFS approach was perceived as one means of addressing issues of quality in education across the country, and it consequently became a major driver of pedagogical reform, with child-centred active learning being a prominent feature of the CFS approach in the Maldives. Like many other nations promoting such pedagogical reform, the Maldives has experienced challenges in its implementation. Schweisfurth (2013, p. 65) refers to four broad obstacles in her comprehensive book on the topic: 'the nature of the reform process; resources; teacher capacity; and national, institutional and professional cultures'.

The history of how CFS was introduced to the Maldives, has some bearing on how active learning was understood and the scope of the intended changes. The introduction of CFS into the Maldives was based on the Gonoshahajjo Sangshta (GSS) model from Bangladesh, which promoted the use of learning corners in lower primary classrooms (Grades 1-3). Extra resources were provided by UNICEF, including tiles to allow for floor work and additional teaching resources. The change to the daily lesson structure, along with the physical arrangement of learning corners in the room, came to represent the CFS model in Maldivian schools (Shareef, 2007). However, the learning corners were reported to work 'better in theory than in the current practice' (Shafeega et al., 2005, p. 2). An evaluation of the 22 schools pilot project reported:

> Teachers are not using active learning techniques but rely heavily on textbook work pages which indicates that they are not sufficiently trained in the methodology. Whilst the elements of the model are in place, teachers are not yet equipped with the skills needed to make it a child centred, active learning environment. (Wheatcroft, 2004, p. 14)

Yet this model of CFS has brought some changes to the traditional structures in classrooms and greater flexibility. It has also brought increased opportunity for teachers' professional development through the establishment of Teacher Resource Centres (TRCs) in each atoll, with support from UNICEF following the 2004 tsunami. These were intended as a professional development (PD) hub for each atoll to decentralise PD opportunities. While some schools are close to the TRC island, outlying islands may still face limited access and opportunities and, consequently, remain isolated.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate how teachers can enact active learning pedagogy in the Maldivian education system. DBR, as the overarching methodology of this study, acknowledges the critical role of context in enacting innovations. This is an interventionist methodology, which examines the conditions that influence how educational innovations work in real-life practice. In DBR the context is richly delineated (O'Toole & Beckett, 2009) and serves as an integral part of the research (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). Whilst not reporting on the intervention in this paper, the characteristics of DBR provide a framework for acknowledging the various layers of influence impacting teachers' practice and the use of active learning in the Maldivian education system.

The study of the surrounding context was designed to provide details of the mesosystem context and elucidate conditions in the school regarding the introduction and use of active learning and the factors supporting its use. The study took place on a local fishing island (Figure 2), referred to as the Research School. It was selected as offering optimum conditions for implementing the intervention because of their proactive approach in implementing CFS. Therefore, the characteristics of this school are of interest in the context of explicating the factors that have influenced reform. It is an Atoll Education Centre, hence the education hub for the atoll. It offers two phases of primary education (Grades 1-4, also referred to as CFS grades) and Grades 5-7 (subject-based teachers) and secondary classes offering O and A-level education.

Figure 2: Island shot taken from a seaplane

An output of DBR is the development of 'design principles' (McKenney & Reeves, 2012), the theoretical output of the research. These are intended to inform the work of others interested in enacting innovations in relevant settings. The supporting contextual factors, identified within the Research School, were converted to design principles as an outcome of this study.

A range of participants, from the school and island context, were interviewed in order to understand the 'context and surrounding systems' (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 169). Purposive sampling was used, targeting 'key informants who are particularly knowledgeable' (Patton, 2002, p. 321) about CFS, the history of active learning on the island and teaching practice in the school (see Table 1). Ethics clearance, for this study, was granted by the Humanities and Applied Sciences Committee at The University of Melbourne.

Additional data, gathered from teachers during the intervention phase of the study, where it adds additional insights to the key contextual features, has also been used. This data is attributed to teachers as a group, as it does not form the main data source within the scope of this article.

Table 1: School and Island participants

Participants	Coding system used in text
Senior Management Team (SMT) • 2 Leading teachers (for CFS Grades 1-4, Primary Grades 5-7) • Teacher Resource Centre Coordinator • Professional Development Coordinator • Island Councillor (School Board member) • Current principal • Previous principal • Local Resort Manager	SMT 1-8[1]

RESULTS

Following the 2004 tsunami and the extra funds made available from UNICEF to expand CFS nationally, the school saw "an opportunity to develop*"* (SMT2). This prompted the senior management team (SMT) to hold "a very big meeting with parents*"* (SMT4) which began a proactive consultative process with parents concerning implementing change within the school. Therefore, parents had a pivotal role in supporting the new program being introduced into the school. This is not always the case in Maldivian schools, which a visitor to the school attested:

> In some of the schools they are not conducting any awareness program for the parents . . . the problem is, the school management. They don't want the parents to come into the school. The gates are closed for the parents . . . But here the school itself has given the opportunity and at the same time parents are ready. That's the reason why the school is having very good rapport with the community. (MoE Official)

Instead, this school and parents worked as a team, as one senior management person asserted, resulting in an inclusive process (SMT2).

Parents in Maldivian schools can exert a lot of influence in schools (Di Biase, 2010; Wheatcroft, 2005). As one SMT member remarked:

> [T]he school, the parents, they force the teachers to use the textbook. Even when I was a teacher once I left one of the pages, I know how much parents complaining all day. But when we had a lot of meetings and explain the difference of using that and not using that, now they realize . . . yeah, the students can achieve their objectives. (SMT5)

The approach taken in this school to bringing about change with the CFS program has channelled parents' attention into positive involvement, rather than as a constraining influence. Parents are called upon whenever "any delegation comes to visit the school or the CFS program . . . to help with providing food and accommodation and sometimes to share their experience with visitors" (SMT2). "The school and parents are very proud of this program" (SMT2).

[1] These codes have not been specifically allocated to individual participants to protect their anonymity, given the smallness of the island.

Planning for change

The school planned strategically for the introduction of CFS. The SMT considered a number of factors impacting on their ability to carry out change, as indicated in the following comment:

> The first thing that everybody must know [is] what it is—what we started . . . I think another important part is training teachers. If we don't give training I don't think they can do things in the classroom, that's another part. And also we have to see how the school budget—whether they can do certain things, so that is one area we thought. And more important part is the school management, I guess. Because if anybody in the management is not supportive in this maybe we can't do it. (SMT5)

The importance of developing a shared vision is a priority within the school with members of the SMT reporting the necessity of working as a team and providing a uniform message to teachers.

Leadership

Collaboration and support within the SMT was a recurring theme. The school management took several actions that were perceived as enabling the successful introduction of CFS: they collaborated as a team at the senior management level ("whenever we are going to start new things we always discuss so we understand what is involved" (SMT2)); they collaborated with parents ("we worked as a team with parents" (SMT2)); and they were supportive in supplying resources where it was possible to do so (SMT2, SMT5). For example, the new AV projectors were obtained with the support of parents led by senior management in the school.

In particular, key personnel can be identified in this school who worked strategically to promote change. For example, one long-standing member of the management team (SMT5) was attributed to being the 'mastermind' behind the changes. A SMT member stated: "he is very attentive with that program and he always tries to discuss ideas with me also as well as ideas from the teachers. We work as a team" (SMT2).

Training for teachers

The need for teacher training and opportunities for these island teachers to access new ideas was widely acknowledged as necessary conditions for both initiating and sustaining change. Further, as one SMT emphasized, the purpose of the training must be made explicit to teachers: "Training yeah, how to plan for this . . . So all the elements the teachers have to be trained and also they must know why they are doing that and what the purpose is". He added that in the early stages of implementation "we brought an expert from Malé also and we gave the training for all the teachers, so all the teachers are aware of this [CFS] when we started" (SMT5). Consequently, teachers received training in the elements of the initial CFS model when it was first introduced to the Maldives. Teacher training and practical support was identified as a necessary precondition. Hosting visitors to the island also provided teachers with an opportunity to share their knowledge and discuss experiences and successes, which contributed to their professional development.

Adapting the model of CFS

In the process of preparing for implementation, the SMT took the approach that the CFS model needed to be changed to fit in with the school's circumstances (SMT1). The school determined that the GSS model was inadequate "because [of] the classroom population, lack of resources and the teachers' workload" (SMT5). Consequently, the school developed a

*"*different CFS methodology*"* (SMT 2) and their own approach to the innovation. The school has aspired, over the years, to become a model CFS school and has hosted Maldivian and international educators who come to witness the progress they have made with adapting the CFS approach to their school.

Physical changes

Parents were involved in bringing about changes to the physical appearance of the classrooms by building resources and furniture (Figure 2). These visible changes were signs of a different approach to teaching in the school community (SMT3). Parents could see that established routines were being altered and appeared open to the introduction and application of new methods. The physical changes, it would seem, were necessary at the start of the change process as an indication that the status quo was shifting. One member of the SMT, working with non-CFS teachers noted, "The main thing I found is that the classroom set-up is the main problem" (SMT4). He believed that maintaining the traditional classroom set-up sustains a certain mindset with parents which presents difficulties when promoting pedagogical change.

Figure 2: Classroom resources for CFS classrooms

Considerable pride is taken in the CFS classroom displays. Issues have arisen with double session school days where primary and secondary classrooms are shared as some older students do not respect the classroom displays of younger students (SMT 4). CFS classes share the same classrooms so do not face these constraints. Great hope is placed in a single session school day across the school community.

> We have planned to change the classroom displays even though the floor is not tiled . . . we can change the classroom set-up and the grouping [of desk] and more display boards. Then I think there will a change . . . if we get a single classroom for us. (SMT4)

Support and mentoring from leading teachers

Teachers articulated their need for classroom-based support. One teacher stated, "[we can] learn from demonstration by leading teachers or some others". Teachers referred to the key role of leading teachers, also referred to as supervisors, in mentoring teachers and as a source of ideas.

> I think leading teacher must support us . . . he is always supporting us to use different types of teaching methods . . . he also sometimes giving ideas so we will do.

> Management side encourage a lot doing this—in each and every meeting—likes to give ideas.

One leading teacher (SMT4) outlined his responsibilities as: having a monitoring role; giving feedback; encouraging teachers; and providing new ideas. Getting such feedback was acknowledged by the teachers as an important practice in the school. The teachers acknowledged the role of school management in supporting them in implementing the new approach indicated by the following statement by a teacher: "school management enabled us to do it and supervisor" This contrasts with other schools where leading teachers may not have adequate skills or the knowledge base to provide ongoing support to teachers (Shareef, 2007; Wheatcroft, 2004), although their key role in promoting change is recognized (Shareef, 2008).

DISCUSSION: ESTABLISHING A CHANGE-WELCOMING SCHOOL CULTURE

Classroom practice does not function in isolation from the context in which it is situated. The school at the centre of this study has features which provide a particular set of circumstances for teaching within the Maldivian education system. Against a broader context of the problematic implementation of CFS in the country, it is an example of a school that Schweisfurth (2013, p. 127) refers to as a 'resilient school', which sets itself apart from national trends. The Research School was designated as providing optimal conditions for operationalising the intervention and, for this reason, it posed particular interest in investigating its contextual features. This is consistent with Mtika and Gates (2010, p. 403) who stress the need to design and engineer pedagogical strategies to fit local contexts and the importance of a school culture and classroom structures that support LCE. Therefore, by investigating its particular circumstances and institutional culture, it provides insights into how it is possible to promote reform within the Maldives education system and the policy context that exists.

Leading change: The role of school leadership

The leadership in the school is a critical aspect for not only in leading change but also for creating a 'change-welcoming' school culture, a term used by Megahed, Ginsburg, Abdellah and Zohry (2012) when identifying the factors that supported active learning reform in Egypt. Interestingly, Hallinger's (2010, p. 414) notion of the 'supreme law strategy' and a top down implementation approach, which has the potential to result in superficial compliance, contrasts with how the leadership team in this school managed the change process. The pivotal role of leadership was seen in not only endorsing change but also evidenced in the planned and strategic approach of the CFS program and how this was managed across the school community. Embracing practices that are culturally sensitive also requires adopting an implementation method that works with and not against the cultural context. The leadership in this school, as a driving force, took an inclusiveness approach across the different stakeholder groups that facilitated buy-in of CFS. According to Schweisfurth:

> If LCE implementation is taken seriously, shared clarity among teachers about its purpose and classroom workings needs to be fundamental to the process, and it needs to happen in a wider education context of purposeful order. (2013, p. 137)

The approach by the SMT created a purposeful context for change. From the initial stages, the Research School began a process of adopting and adapting the CFS innovation into the school at the lower grades. In recognising that the initial GSS model of CFS would not

adequately fit with their circumstances, the school revealed a rationale for matching the desired change to their context. The school's approach to implementing CFS highlights the power of influences within the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) when facilitating change.

Parent-school collaboration

The idea of a culturally sensitive approach to reform was illustrated by Hallinger and Kantamara (2001) with reference to Thailand. The notion of 'sanook', meaning fun, was explained as having an important role in sustaining interest in change. Comparing such a culturally sensitive approach to the Maldives, the very 'islandness' of the country and the strong island identity that Maldivians hold, would seemingly offer a motivating force for change, although, as noted, this is not always practised in Maldivian schools. Yet the strong identification that Maldivians hold for their islands could potentially be harnessed to support reform:

> With independent island communities, and a strong interest in education, the vested interest of the stakeholders could be a powerful force for change through community dialogue. Each island has a unique character and this would be part of the community process in developing a plan or vision suitable for their island school and an indigenous adaption of key concepts. (Di Biase, 2009, p. 290)

Working with, not around the island community, as demonstrated in the Research School is an important feature where community participation is not only welcome but sought after. Facilitating buy-in by stakeholders is an important condition for reform (Brock & Crossley, 2013). Likewise, the need for creating dialogue among stakeholders has been well-documented as an enabling condition (for example Dembélé & Miaro-II, 2003).

School management and organisation of resources

The organisational conditions for learning were raised by teachers as impacting on their ability to enact active learning: school infrastructure, teaching resources, and time, one of the obstacles identified earlier by Schweisfurth (2013). Likewise, Mtika and Gates (2010, p. 402) refer to the need for 'supportive settings in classrooms', highlighting the shortage of space and resources as challenges that teachers face. Within the school, several issues around scheduling influenced teachers' use of the active learning intervention, notably lesson timing, the double session day, and teacher absences. How the school responded reveals aspects of the school which could be changed through the will and vision of the management, while other features were beyond the scope of the school to control.

For example, teachers cited lesson length as a barrier to active learning. In a responsive approach the SMT extended lesson times from 35 to 45 minutes per lesson. Rather than accepting the status quo, this troubleshooting approach by the school responded to teachers' difficulties. Seeking to solve issues where possible is a particular characteristic of this school. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) represents the intersection of the various layers of influence and, as Alexander (2001) contends in his study of culture and pedagogy, the levels of influence are interconnected. Yet, such intersections can promote a blame game, where teachers and government blame each other and, in the process, undermine their own agency. Such a scenario is also raised by Schweisfurth (2011, p. 430) where 'teachers blame policy-makers and administrators for unsuitable policy and lack of support, and policy-makers blame teachers for not implementing it'. Taking charge of the bell times is a proactive move by the school. I have visited many other schools in the country, where the

limits of 35 minute lessons were raised, but I did not witness other schools taking such a proactive approach.

The double school session was reported as a further challenge, particularly in the sharing of classrooms and the limited furniture in the non-CFS classrooms, which meant materials could not be stored. Mtika and Gates (2010) report a shortage of space and resources as a constraint to LCE. Such challenges with the infrastructure were something the school could not easily solve, but the inclusive approach with parents in the introduction of CFS helped to provide additional classroom resources. This challenge also serves to distinguish between the different levels of constraints in that some can be more easily solved from within the school, while others are more problematic. Being able to differentiate these constraints is a crucial feature of the Research School, and a distinctive element of being a 'resilient school'.

Leading teachers and classroom-based support

Leading teachers play a pivotal role in teachers' daily work. Their endorsement and assistance are critical in supporting teachers to embrace new practices in contrast to their administrative and gatekeeper role in Maldivian schools (Shareef, 2008). Supporting the focus on the provision of support, Megahed et al. (2012) report on reform in Egypt where supervisors moved from being inspectors to a source of guidance and support to promote active learning pedagogy. In the Research School, the leading teachers clearly embraced and supported the innovation. However, even with their endorsement, the need for explicit classroom focused support was articulated by teachers. Yet, for leading teachers to provide this level of classroom-based support, their role needs to shift from an administrative and evaluative focus to one centred around mentoring (Shareef, 2008) consistent with the study in Egypt (Megahed et al., 2012). This approach begins to deal with the obstacle of supporting teachers in developing capacity to embrace LCE, another of the obstacles identified by Schweisfurth (2013).

DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN SUPPORTING CHANGE AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

The notion of a 'pedagogical nexus', a term proposed by Hufton and Elliot (2000) in reference to the Russian education context, is used by Schweisfurth (2013, p. 140) to describe a set of linked, interactive and mutually reinforcing influences on students' learning. Each context, she contends, has its own unique array of 'ingredients' with different levels of coherence. The Research School, I argue, comes closer to achieving coherency across the nested layers of influence of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, particularly in the CFS grades. Situated within the Maldivian education system, this school embraced innovation in a way that has afforded it greater coherency across these 'ingredients' and provided an example of a proactive approach to the reform process. Drawing on Schweisfurth's notion of the 'resilient school', which has gone against the dominant narrative of failed implementation, is the goal to better understand how LCE practices have been mediated to fit the local context. The Research School is framed as one such school. The success of the introduction of CFS to Grades 1-3, and the later expansion to Grade 4, emphasised the school's proactive approach, both in its management of the process and the model they developed for their CFS classes. The findings from this study have drawn attention to the factors that led to this school's journey toward a more coherent pedagogical nexus.

Three overarching design principles are now presented in Box 1. These are focused on Bronfenbrenner's level of mesosystem and elucidate the features of the Research School that

make it a 'resilient school'. These design principles, emerging from this study, can be assessed for their suitability to other applicable contexts.

BOX 1: Design principles: Overarching principles in supporting change at the school level: *Developing a 'change-welcoming' school*

Leading change: the role of school leadership

School leadership needs to create a vision for change and to support and lead change within the school community.

The school leadership adopted a planned and strategic approach to implementing CFS. Adapting innovation to the needs of the school has been a feature of change in the school, orchestrated through an inclusive process. This responsive approach promotes dialogue in and between stakeholders and allows the innovation to be adapted and adjusted so that it is in harmony with the local community and fits with local circumstances. Therefore, the school leadership holds a critical role in leading, endorsing and supporting change within the school.

Parent-school collaboration

Harness the support of Maldivian island communities in educational reform through an inclusive process that mobilises community participation.

Mobilising school community support for reform is an important enabling condition in Maldivian schools. With schools forming an integral part of island life, parent support can be harnessed through an inclusive process of communication and collaboration, creating a vision for change relevant to the island community. The parents, as seen in this school, provide concrete support in the form of helping develop physical resources for the school and hosting visitors to the school.

School management and organisation of resources

Organisational features can influence teachers' enactment of active learning. A responsive approach by the school leadership in managing available resources is needed to address teacher and concerns.

Whilst some organisational issues are beyond the scope of the school to manage, the school leadership has been responsive to teachers' needs, accommodating requests and making adjustments where it is possible to do so.

Leading teachers and classroom-based support

Classroom-based support, within the context of teachers' work, is needed to develop teachers' capacity.

Leadership endorsement and support are needed to encourage professional experimentation and sustain the impetus for innovation. Leading teachers need to provide mentoring and classroom-based support to support teachers in enacting new pedagogical approaches.

CONCLUSION

The smallness of Maldivian islands has posed challenges for development across the country. Yet smallness also has some advantages (see Crossley & Sprague, 2012) and in this study it rendered more visible the school and island activities that influenced the uptake of active learning pedagogy in the Maldivian context. Brock and Crossley (2013, p. 399) assert that 'the processes of mediation' seen in some small states reveals a 'reworked global agenda to better meet local needs'. In this vein, the Research School illustrates a process of mediation in seeking to reconcile global agendas with local needs. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conceptualisation of context is helpful in understanding how factors outside the classroom influence what happens inside the classroom. The example of the Research School illustrates

how small states, or in this case a small island, can play a role in elucidating answers to the implementation challenges of active learning through the design principles that can inform the work of others interested in enacting similar innovations in other relevant settings.

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Experiences of Bhutanese teachers in wellbeing leadership roles: Contextual realities of implementing a whole-school approach to student wellbeing promotion

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Schools are ideal sites for the promotion of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enhance personal as well as collective wellbeing. Schools engage in numerous programs and activities to promote the wellbeing of students. Despite indications of positive effects of a whole-school approach, reports find that implementation is challenging because these programs typically require fundamental changes to the ways in which schools operate and are organized. Although they are key implementers, the experiences and challenges that middle-level leaders in schools face when working towards a whole-school approach has been rarely reported. This qualitative study explored the perceptions and experiences of key implementers in implementing a whole-school approach to student wellbeing promotion in secondary schools in the small Kingdom of Bhutan. Findings suggest that they face numerous challenges in implementing a whole-school approach to student wellbeing that revolve around culture and context.

Keywords: student wellbeing; whole-school approach; implementation contextual factors

INTRODUCTION

Wellbeing is as much an individual as it is a societal aspiration. We all seek a quality of life characterized by sound health, peace of mind, positive relationships, prosperity, and contentment. Education is a key mechanism through which wellbeing can be promoted in effective and sustainable ways. Schools represent important sites for promoting wellbeing, whether it is to address the personal wellbeing of students, or to prepare them as agents of societal change.

The promotion of student wellbeing in schools can cover a diverse range of programs and activities, with aims that range from student management to student empowerment. Efforts to address wellbeing are sometimes recognized as an important and integral aspect of a school's responsibility and, at other times, presumed to be peripheral activities intended to address distractions to the central aim of academic and intellectual development.

In this study, wellbeing is conceptualized as consisting of multiple and inter-related dimensions operating at individual, relational, and collective levels (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007). Student wellbeing promotion refers to the practice of promoting

these in schools through school policies, the ways in which schools are organized, and teaching and learning of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be well.

This study draws on the experiences of key implementers of student wellbeing programs in schools in the small Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. The aim of the study is to gain an understanding of the challenges that teachers in student wellbeing leadership roles face in implementing a whole-school approach to student wellbeing.

STUDENT WELLBEING PROMOTION IN BHUTAN

Bhutan is a land-locked kingdom in the Himalayas located between China and India, with an area of 38,394 sq. km. It has a population of 768,577 of which 172,919 are school children (National Statistics Bureau, 2016). In 2012, Bhutan's adult literacy rate was 63 per cent (2012), and in 2015, had a GDP per capita of US$2,719 (National Statistics Bureau, 2016). Bhutan became a democratic constitutional monarchy in 2008, and the *Constitution of Bhutan* guarantees free basic education (seven years of primary and four years of secondary education).

A modern and secular system of schooling in Bhutan began in the 1960s, coinciding with its first Five-Year Development Plan. It started with a borrowed system from India, which, in turn, was largely an inheritance of British colonial education. Prior to this, Buddhist monastic education prevailed and, although it still continues to thrive, it is separate from the mainstream secular Westernized education. The first major attempt to Bhutanize and reform the Education system was launched with the introduction of the New Approach to Primary Education (NAPE) in 1986. NAPE represented a major shift from a borrowed curriculum that was teacher- and textbook-centred teaching to a Bhutanized curriculum that emphasized an activity-based, learner-centred approach. This was followed by a gradual vertical expansion of curricular changes relevant to Bhutan's needs and aspirations. For example, imported textbooks were replaced with textbooks written locally with local content, especially for humanities and social sciences; and the Bhutan Board of Examination (now Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment) took over school examinations and assessment from the Indian Council for Secondary Education.

Since the late 1990s, the promotion of 'wholesome education', saw the introduction of school programs such as the comprehensive health program, values education, reproductive health and population education, career guidance and counselling (UNESCO, 2011). In 2009, Bhutan launched the Education for Gross National Happiness (E4GNH) initiative that emphasized the importance of transforming the Education system to embody and reflect the values and principles of Gross National Happiness (GNH). GNH is Bhutan's development philosophy that puts human wellbeing as a measure of development as opposed to the conventional GDP or economic growth. However, beyond policy-level discourse, it remained largely absent from the school-level practices until the introduction of E4GNH.

E4GNH is described as a way of 'enriching learning, and improving the process of education. It has to do with creating a context and an approach that infuses a GNH consciousness into everything that is learned' (Hayward & Colman, 2010, p. 222). This statement underscores the importance of schools as settings where GNH is 'lived', and not just talked about and, therefore, can be viewed as a holistic approach to the promotion of student wellbeing. E4GNH represents a reform effort to inculcate and operationalize

GNH values in Education by infusing it into the curriculum and all aspects of school programs and activities (Ministry of Education, 2012). It is envisioned to be the anchor holding together the various strands of schooling, including programs and activities aimed at student wellbeing and presumed to contribute to 'wholesome education', but often referred to as co-curricular activities, although remained largely fragmented in its implementation. The School Guidance and Counselling Program forms a major aspect of this and is already aligned along the tenets of a whole-school approach in that it tries to address student wellbeing through curriculum, counselling, and consultation services, and reaches out to the parents and other agencies outside the school. While the substance of the E4GNH can be considered indigenous and based on the GNH values influenced by Buddhism, the form in which it is propagated is intended to be a whole-school approach.

IMPLEMENTING A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

In recent times, student wellbeing has been conceptualized as integral to education and as a form of learning in itself (e.g., De Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007; Markham & Aveyard, 2003; Noddings, 2003; St. Leger, Young, Blanchard, & Perry, 2010). Consistent with this thinking, a whole-school approach to student wellbeing promotion is proposed which calls for the inclusion of student wellbeing promotion in a school's policies, curriculum, structures, and practices, making it a shared responsibility of all stakeholders. Several systematic reviews report evidence in support of a whole-school approach to student wellbeing promotion. St Leger et al. (2010), based on their review of research literature on health promotion, assert that school programs that are integrated, holistic, and strategic are more likely to produce better health and education outcomes than those which are mainly information-based and implemented only in the classroom. This confirms an earlier review of research literature by Lister-Sharp, Chapman, Stewart-Brown, and Sowden (1999), which described a whole-school approach as a promising and multifaceted approach likely to be most effective given its focus on a combination of curriculum, ethos, and environment, and family and community partnerships.

Several studies (Bond et al., 2004; Flay, Graumlich, Segawa, Burns, & Holliday, 2004**;** Hazell, 2005; Lee, Cheng, Fung, & St Leger, 2006; Patton et al., 2006**;** Wyn, Cahill, Holdsworth, Rowling, & Carson, 2000), reviews of interventions (Stewart-Brown, 2006; Wells, Barlow, & Stewart-Brown, 2003) as well as a meta-analysis of randomized control trials (Langford et al., 2014) report positive benefits and effectiveness of a whole-school approach to aspects of student wellbeing and academic achievement. These reports suggest the benefits of targeting system-wide changes with multiple interventions in the areas of teaching-learning, ethos, and environment, and collaboration with parents and communities. However, they also point to some concerns and challenges. These include the lack of or limited information on interventions involving school environment and partnerships (Deschesnes, Martin, & Hill, 2003; Langford et al., 2014), and lack of detailed information on implementation or process evaluation (Blank et al., 2009; Langford, et al., 2014), and a lack of information on contextual understanding (Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003). These findings reported in the literature are based on studies in the Western and developed world and rarely, if at all, come from small states in the developing world.

Implementing a whole-school approach is challenging because it requires going beyond delivering classroom programs to addressing school ethos and environment, policy and practices, and developing or extending partnerships with parents, community groups or

health agencies, all of which involved additional time, energy, and resources (Wyn et al., 2000). Yet, research evidence suggests that effective implementation is associated with better outcomes (Durlak & Dupre, 2008; Wilson, Lipsey, & Derzon, 2003; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

To be effective, change initiatives require adaptations to suit local contexts (Botvin, Griffin, & Nichols, 2006), and it is the local choices about practice that dominate outcomes of change (McLaughlin, 2005). Schools not only differ in the environmental and resource support available, but also differ in their views, approaches, policies, and practices (McLaughlin, 2005). Within schools, all teachers make adaptations to programs (Datnow & Castellano, 2000) and do so in different ways, leading to different consequences (Klinger, Cramer, & Harry, 2006). In addition to those in school, there are various other stakeholders, such as parents and community members involved in the school who are bound to act or react in numerous ways that impact implementation. Hence, understanding the dynamics involved in the implementation process is key to ensuring effective change. In the context of small nations, it becomes even more important to understand the contextual factors because small nations have distinctive characteristics (Crossley, 2010). It cannot be assumed that findings elsewhere, especially those from the developed world, will equally apply.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a constructivist interpretive theoretical orientation that assumes multiple constructed realities, and views truth and knowledge are subjective and socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). While it explored the perceptions and experiences of key informants on what they considered to be the factors that challenged them as key implementers in general, this report focuses on challenges associated with school culture and context. School culture, in this study, refer to: the policies, procedures and practices within a school community; and the assumptions, beliefs and the values underlying these. These range from beliefs and views held by those in the school, the school's vision, mission, and values; the school's physical, social, and emotional climate; and the ways in which schools are structured as organizations. It constitutes a complex interplay of numerous aspects that are both tangible and intangible.

A small number of 'information-rich' participants (four) from public secondary schools (one rural, one semi-urban, and two urban) in Western Bhutan were chosen through a purposeful sampling strategy, and interviewed face-to-face. The participants (two males and two females) were trained teachers with a graduate certificate majoring in school guidance and counselling; they had between four to six years of experience. Each participant was interviewed three times for approximately an hour on each occasion over a period of over one-and-half months. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed. In addition to embedding findings in contextual descriptions as far as possible, member checks, triangulation, peer debriefing and maintaining an audit trail were some of the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness. Documents and technical literature, such as policies, newsletters, brochures, reports, and website information were collected to fill in contextual information gaps and corroborate information obtained from interviews and observations of the school settings.

Written informed consent was sought from both individual participants and institutions involved; and measures were taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Where

participants are quoted in this report, only pseudonyms are used, referred to as Pedrup, Lhazom, Tyendel and Keldon.

Whereas a sound and complete understanding of the challenges and issues of implementing a whole-school approach will require perspectives of all the stakeholders involved, this study only focussed on the perspectives of school counsellors as student wellbeing leaders. School counsellors play a major role in the promotion of student wellbeing. Their roles include the teaching of guidance curriculum that include career education and life skills, providing counselling services to students with emotional and behavioural issues, providing consultation services and liaising with teachers, parents, and other professionals, and conducting parent education sessions, or similar other wellbeing programs and activities amongst other things. Even though, as key implementers, they are likely to be most knowledgeable and have first-hand experience, it is still an incomplete view.

FINDINGS

Despite the appeal and promise of a whole-school approach, the findings from this study point to a number of implementation challenges that relate to school culture and context. Addressing school ethos, organization, and environment is one of the key components of a whole-school approach. This includes the important role of school culture, and often the need for its transformation, for bringing about effective and sustainable change, or, in this case, student wellbeing promotion. Throughout the interviews, in sharing their experiences of the challenges they face in implementing student wellbeing programs, participants either made explicit statements or implied school organizational culture as an important aspect that needed to be addressed. Prominent among these were concerns and challenges that revolve around beliefs and norms, school organizational structure, principal's leadership and support, and professional authority and legitimacy. Findings suggest that, for a whole-school approach to promoting student wellbeing to work, it will be important to establish a shared understanding of what constitutes student wellbeing, paying attention to the prevalent and competing norms and beliefs, and to work on the existing school organizational structures because it will be near impossible to effectively implement a whole-school approach if the existing structures are adapted to support or accommodate it. In achieving these, school leadership plays a critical role.

Views and beliefs of what constitute student wellbeing

Despite the advocacy and the value attached to a whole-school approach, one of the challenges of implementation appear to be that schools continue to be deeply entrenched in traditional beliefs of control and compliance, and a reactive approach to treating those that are unwell. While these may still be relevant, the challenge is to reconcile their central position to create a more holistic approach that also includes being proactive and making student wellbeing a shared responsibility.

Views and beliefs around what constitute student wellbeing came up as an important theme in the interviews as an influential factor affecting implementation. Participants not only defined what student wellbeing meant to them but also spoke about the place of wellbeing or its value in children's education. In articulating their views on student wellbeing promotion and its implementation, participants often spoke about competing beliefs and views about student wellbeing held by others within the school, such as school leaders and teachers, and the challenges they pose for effective implementation of student

wellbeing programs. Some of them referred to this as the challenge of 'changing mindsets'.

A common theme that came up in the interviews with all four participants is a tension between the punitive consequence-based approach to discipline and the preventive and helping approach in school counselling that they experience. Pedrup and Lhazom spoke most vehemently on this. According to Lhazom, many teachers in her school are of the opinion that 'corporal punishment is always better, and that counselling might be stirring up more problems and issues than solving them . . . They also think that there is a decline in the respect for teachers because of counselling'. She points out that: 'People think that counselling is required only . . . as a curative measure', and 'the fear of Discipline Committee's sanctions is seen as a preventive measure'.

Similarly, Pedrup points out that many of his colleagues blame the school guidance and counselling program for any 'classroom disruption' or disciplinary 'mishaps' as being too 'soft and losing control of students'. He also notes that a 'traditional notion of the teacher-student relationship in our culture' of 'high expectations of obedience and compliance' is still very strong especially among teachers; while the student 'are brought up in a different time', and so do not subscribe to it as much. He feels that such reliance on traditional notions of control and compliance as being disciplined and respectful comes in the way of teachers and students sharing a 'sense of connectedness to each other'. Pedrup feels that being connected with students and getting to know them at a more personal level is important to make students feel at home and like school, but many teachers in his school believe that such a gesture on their part would end up in them losing control of students. Some teachers in his school continue to use physical punishment even when it is officially forbidden. These indicate how difficult it can be to advocate and justify the effectiveness of proactive time and resources intensive approach in the face of deeply entrenched faith in short-term compliance and control.

For many in the schools, student wellbeing is the same as providing non-academic student services to maintain discipline, manage student behaviour, or provide other forms of help and support. There seems to be an implicit underlying thinking that wellbeing is separate from learning, and that it only plays a secondary role of removing hurdles to academic learning. Among the participants, justification for promoting student wellbeing include statements such as: 'It is important for schools to keep the students happy, we have to ensure that their problems are taken care of, and only if they are happy will they be able to focus on their studies' (Lhazom); 'If a student is taken good care of and is well, academics would be taken care of; and if he or she is not given good care, academics may suffer' (Teyndel). Even in terms of time and resource allocations, student wellbeing-related programs and activities mainly fall under 'extra-curricular activities' that receive secondary consideration, and often viewed as expendable. They imply that wellbeing is important because it is instrumental to the achievement of the primary goal of academic achievement, but not necessarily an important aspect of learning in itself or an 'integral' part of learning.

Hence, a fundamental challenge in promoting a whole-school approach to student wellbeing is related to changing teacher beliefs or mindsets. For example, traditional notions of discipline and support services as managing and controlling students to facilitate academic learning tend to persist as time-tested and proven ways. Such beliefs, norms, and values would have evolved over several years and are deeply entrenched (Hargreaves, 1994), often supported by structures that remain unchanged. Addressing

beliefs and attitudes could be critical because educational change literature emphasize that effective implementation requires that all implementers have a shared vision (Fullan, 2009; Hargreaves, 2009) of what is to be the desired change. Professional development in student wellbeing promotion for both school leaders as well as teachers, is needed. This needs to be designed so that it deeply engages teachers in the subject, especially in relation to existing norms and beliefs around student wellbeing; and critically reflecting on their everyday practices.

Organizational structure and strategic direction

In the participants' schools, organizationally, student wellbeing programs fall under the purview of Student Support Services Department or Unit headed by a vice principal. Various programs such as E4GNH, life skills education, values education, guidance and counselling, scouting, and several such other extra-curricular activities, form part of Student Support Services as distinct from the academics. These programs are coordinated or implemented by different people, typically in addition to full-time teaching responsibilities; and often with little time and effort to integrate or collaborate.

While there are several programs and activities that contribute to student wellbeing, their impact is likely undermined by the lack of a cohesive and coordinated approach. It is very rarely, if at all, that the different groups and people with responsibilities for student wellbeing come together to discuss how their activities together contribute to the larger goal of a holistic student wellbeing. Hargreaves (1994) argues that such a balkanized, departmental cubbyhole culture rooted in the division of labour for efficiency is inimical to change and flexibility. Despite the efforts through E4GNH to 'infuse' and integrate across curriculum; structurally, they continue to be 'add-on' peripheral programs and activities around the central goal of academic achievement.

In the absence of an overall framework, Bhutan schools tend to experience a fragmented approach with poor coherence among a variety of programs independently coordinated by various individuals. A strategic policy framework that outlines how student wellbeing fits into the overall framework of what schools view as their vision and mission can provide the basis for making the promotion of student wellbeing an integral aspect unlike being an add-on, peripheral activity of secondary importance as is often the case. Such policy support can provide the required impetus for change implementation (Rowling & Samdal, 2011). In addition to working on a shared understanding through a policy framework, it will be critical to consider how well they fit into existing structures.

All four participants spoke about the Discipline Committee as an important and powerful body in their schools. Its main role is to decide on what punishment or consequences should be meted out to those who violate school rules or codes of conduct. Consequences typically range from verbal or written admonishments and cleaning work to suspension or expulsion from school depending on the severity of offense. For example, in Teyndel's school, apart from students who directly seek his help, it is often the Discipline Committee that refer students to him for counselling, and sets the framework within which counselling is used. He usually receives 'a directive to counsel' a student, typically for a few weeks to 'see if there is any change', and then the Committee makes decisions based on his report and any changes observed. He recounted some bad experiences of students being expelled from school because no tangible progress could be made within the time-frame provided; thereby effectively turning counselling into a part of mechanism for punitive purposes and undermining its underlying assumptions and purpose to provide

student the required help and support. Thus, having to fit new initiatives, such as counselling into existing structures that are often based on contradictory beliefs and assumptions, can be a challenge. Hence, any attempts to introduce student wellbeing programs without making commensurate changes in the structures or the ways in which schools are organized can pose challenges of implementation.

School organograms typically have support services that mirror the academic structure, each one led by a vice principal. However, when it comes down to implementation at classroom level, support service programs and activities receive relatively little time and resource allocation. Opportunities to directly engage with students on proactive knowledge and skill building in regular classes, or to engage with teachers to support them to address student wellbeing needs are limited. For example, one Ministry of Education policy guideline requires allocation of one period of guidance and career education a week. Yet, only one participating school had allocations consistent with this guideline. Even here, they are often supplanted in case of shortfalls in academic subjects for these have examinations, a performance yardstick by which schools are measured. These serve to further perpetuate perceptions of an 'academic-wellbeing' split whereby teachers are inclined to see student wellbeing distinct from the academics and of secondary importance.

Accordingly, these points together, suggest an underlying principle that casts or adds on any new initiatives into the existing framework or mould rather than making adjustments to integrate. They lend support to Hargreaves' (1994) point that the problems secondary schools and teachers face are, in fact, a result of their persistent adherence to the monolithic, opaque and inflexible structures from the past; whereas a culture of collegiality and collaboration is in order.

Leadership support, professional authority, and legitimacy

All the participants identified the Principal's leadership and support as an important factor influencing implementation. They spoke of the Principal's support as a critical factor in being able to sustain their efforts to promote and implement the student wellbeing agenda in the face of strong opposition from many senior colleagues who preferred a more direct and punitive approach to manage students. However, Teyndel's experience of working in different schools has been that it can work both ways: 'some (principals) are pro counselling, others are not, and they have their ideas of what counselling should be'. He notes that where the Principal supports student wellbeing programs, this can be used to leverage and enforce implementation within a school. However, if Principals do not subscribe to the view of student wellbeing as integral to learning, then it becomes an even bigger challenge to implementation.

Principals' active involvement and support has been reported to enhance the quality of implementation, whether it is by creating pressure through expectations or incentives for staff to implement (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009; Weinbaum & Supowitz, 2010). Additionally, it also suggests that it is crucial to ensure that the mindset of leaders are aligned to change initiatives in order to change the culture (Lee, 2004).

The role of leadership support and involvement is also likely amplified as an Education system, or for that matter, Bhutan's culture in general, places high values on a hierarchical power structure. Participants also reported that their relative position in the school hierarchy influence their ability to exert professional authority and add legitimacy to their

role. For example, Lhazom's experiences implementing student referrals in her school is indicative of such a case. The official procedure for referral of students with behavioural issues in her school is for teachers to first try and address it at the classroom level, and then to refer to the school counsellor if it could not be resolved. When making referrals, teachers are required to fill out a form. However, in practice, she points out that 'they (teachers) would rather convey it to me verbally because the form requires them to fill out details of what has been tried and with what results and so on'; and it is often with an attitude of 'you are also a teacher, and . . . let's see what else you can do' that teachers pass it to her.

Both, Lhazom and Keldon spoke about how they are often reminded of their junior status and inexperience each time senior teachers did not like student wellbeing programs and activities that they proposed. Thus, bureaucratic and hierarchical structures are likely to undermine professional autonomy and legitimacy. The weight of their voices in the decision-making process is often based on their relative position in the hierarchy rather than their competence as school counsellors or wellbeing leaders; and they struggle to find legitimacy in their work as wellbeing leaders.

CONCLUSION

Student wellbeing leaders' accounts of the implementation challenges that relate to their school culture and context are characterized by tensions between their aspirations for a proactive and holistic approach to student wellbeing, and prevalent views and structures in school that are often incompatible with these aspirations. Their efforts to promote student wellbeing as integral to learning often contradict school structures and practices that relegate it to a peripheral role. They advocate a more proactive approach, particularly in the context of E4GNH, but they are often caught up with fixing problems within the framework of a consequence-based school discipline system that is deeply rooted in school cultures that have been in existence for a long period of time. This suggests the need to understand the promotion of a whole-school approach to student wellbeing as a change process that requires some unlearning of old and incompatible ways as well as establishing the motivation for change (Lewin, 1997; Marcus, 2000) such as working on a shared vision or meaning of what constitutes student wellbeing.

Educational change theories emphasize the importance of a shared meaning to guide implementation of change (Fullan, 2009; Hargreaves, 2009). Findings from this study suggest that achieving this is a complex business. Not only is student wellbeing understood in a multitude of ways, often with seemingly dichotomous and conflicting views and beliefs; but commensurate changes need to be made in the ways in which schools are structured or organized for any change in views to be effectively translated into practice.

Findings suggest that a clear and comprehensive policy framework that embodies a shared meaning, and guides all student wellbeing promotion programs and activities could be helpful. It could potentially form the basis for a shared understanding within each school community that will still need to be negotiated and nurtured persistently over a period of time for it to take roots in practice. Reconciling and balancing aspects of wellbeing that emphasize control and discipline, provision of reactive care and support services, and a proactive educational approach will require both time and resources, in addition to concerted efforts and the involvement of all stakeholders.

An important finding from this study is that implementing change in schools will require commensurate changes in the ways that the schools are organized or structured. The ways in which student wellbeing programs are structured as an 'add-on', mirroring the academic structure; while making good sense for clear-cut job descriptions and resource allocations also run the risk of creating boundaries that contribute to an 'academic-wellbeing split' culture quite contrary to the notion of wellbeing as integral to education.

Schools are complex institutions with distinct cultures that will require adjustments to accommodate changes. In the case of implementing a whole-school approach to student wellbeing promotion, it entails negotiating competing views, and redesigning deeply-rooted but incompatible structures which make it very challenging. Supportive leadership, policy framework, and making commensurate adjustments in ways in which schools are organized or structured could help provide a cohesive and coherent approach. This includes the need to build the competency of school staff consistent with a whole-school approach. In promoting student wellbeing as integral to learning, this study identifies teacher beliefs and attitudes, strategic direction, such as a policy framework, leadership support, and organizational structure as key areas requiring attention for translating ideas into practice. While the intents of infusing GNH values and operationalizing them through everything that schools do is appealing, effective implementation will require making adaptations to the ways in which schools are used to operating.

The findings of this study also corroborate Crossley's (2010) contention that attention to contextual factors in educational research and international development, is particularly necessary, as seen in the case of this small state. The assumption that if it works in larger nations with more complex systems it can be applied without attention to contextual factors in small states is problematic, given their particular needs and characteristics. This study suggests that, whether large or small, each system has its distinct contextual realities that need to be taken into consideration when introducing reforms.

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An Intervention in literacy in three Pacific nations: Implications of a context specific approach to co-design

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In this paper, we consider the implications of a commitment to acknowledging the role of context within a research practice partnership. We outline the approach to doing so within a design-based research intervention with 42 schools across three Pacific Island countries to improve literacy learning and language development. In doing so, the paper identifies context as a central concern for student and teacher learning, for schools as organisations and for intervention implementation. We draw on theories of context from each of these research bases to consider how aid interventions can best contribute to enhancing student learning outcomes across varied student populations in a way that is contextually appropriate, and builds sustainable local capability for ongoing improvement. In considering these concerns we argue for the potential of a design-based research approach, based on the Learning Schools Model (McNaughton, Lai, Jesson & Wilson, 2013) to incorporate 'co-design' of the intervention. We exemplify how the process of jointly designing the content and implementation within preset phases of implementation is possible in ways that draw on the varied expertise of in-country and external partners. The focus on collective knowledge building, collective problem solving and sharing practice within trusting relationships is considered to foster capacity for sustained adaptation and improvement at local levels. We believe such an approach is relevant to the challenges faced by Pacific Island Ministries of Education and their aid donor partners in designing effective interventions for learning improvement.

Keywords: educational improvement, schools, literacy

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we consider the implications for intervention methodology when working in a research practice partnership and taking a design-based approach to working with schools. We report on the approach taken with 42 schools across three Pacific Island countries to improve students' literacy learning and language development in the early grades. In doing so, we bring together three intersecting concerns prominent in discussions of international aid interventions for school improvement; resource constraints, contextual appropriateness and sustainability. Specifically, we consider the implications of these concerns in implementing an aid intervention which seeks to contribute to enhancing student learning outcomes across varied student populations in a way that is 1) commensurate with the resources (financial and human) available; 2) is contextually appropriate; and 3) builds sustainable local capability for ongoing improvement and adaption. This paper presents an argument for the potential of a design-based research approach based on the Learning Schools Model (McNaughton, Lai, Jesson & Wilson, 2013) for addressing these concerns within the context presented by the Pacific Island countries involved.

In this article, we exemplify a partnership approach to intervention design, involving in-country and external partners at every level (school, Ministry authorities, programme team) and at every stage of the process, which we call co-design. We illustrate how such an approach allows a targeted intervention to be developed in ways that are theoretically robust, contextually responsive and build sustainable capability for ongoing improvement. We argue too that examining local practice through collective problem solving offers both a 'mirror' and a 'window' view on practice. Feedback on data collected provide a mirror and catalyst for reflection and analysis of practice, as well as offering a window into different ways of doing things for researchers as well as teachers. While the process is replicated across contexts, the inbuilt co-design leads to improvements in practice that draw on international expertise as well as being intentionally context-relevant and therefore meaningful. Further, we argue that the emphasis on collective problem solving and sharing practice within trusting relationships fosters capacity for sustained adaptation and improvement at local levels. We believe such an approach is relevant to the challenges faced by Pacific Island Ministries of Education and their aid donor partners in designing effective interventions for learning improvement. However, we also consider the tensions inherent in such an approach.

This paper starts with an overview of the Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme (PLSLP) – the research-practice partnership that we are reporting on – and the background to its establishment, including a description of the design-based research methodology used within the partnership. Key elements of the theoretical framework that underpin the design of the partnership are then presented. The corollaries of the theoretical framework for the design and implementation of the intervention are then demonstrated through describing the various phases of the intervention and methods used. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of tensions created by a design-based research approach and the resulting strategies to address these within the approach.

BACKGROUND TO THE PACIFIC LITERACY AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

The Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme (PLSLP) was initiated in 2014 by the New Zealand Aid Programme in partnership with Ministries of Education in several Pacific countries. PLSLP was initiated as a response to concerns about low literacy

achievement scores amongst students and a desire expressed by the participating Ministries to better understand and develop local solutions to the specific dynamics of the patterns of literacy achievement. The University of Auckland in partnership with the Institute of Education of the University of the South Pacific were selected to design and implement a programme that would address these concerns, across three relatively diverse Pacific Island countries working with between 12 and 15 schools per country[1].

While diverse, the countries share relatively centralised systems, a high proportion of geographically dispersed schools with variable transport and communication infrastructure, bi- or multi-lingual school populations, and constraints in sustaining an adequately qualified teacher workforce. Responsibility for teacher professional learning and development, curriculum design, and resource provision largely rests with the national Ministries in each country. With the vast majority of education budgets dedicated to payroll, there are limited resources and variable structures for the ongoing professional support and development of the teaching profession. International aid for education service delivery and reform has been a prominent feature of all three countries involved in PLSLP and is likely to continue to be for the foreseeable future. Finally, all three countries meet the criteria of so-called "small island developing states", which proponents of this classification argue bring particular challenges for education development related to scale, geography, and institutionalism (Crossley, 2010).

PLSLP was initiated partly in response to Ministry and aid donor concerns about the limited impact at a classroom level of previous interventions, and lack of robust information about the actual practices of teaching and learning occurring within the classrooms, and the relationship to student outcomes (NZ MFAT, 2014). While literacy has long been a stated priority across most Pacific Island jurisdictions, Pacific governments and aid donors alike have tended to focus on top-down initiatives often managerial in focus such as school-based management, curricula reform and development, accountability driven mechanisms such as standardised assessments and performance standards (NZ MFAT, 2014). While there is increased recognition of the pivotal role teachers and school leaders play in achieving and sustaining learning outcomes, and a greater focus on mechanisms for motivating higher performance from teachers and leaders within schools, the pathways for achieving these have not been clear.

It is in this context, that we responded to the opportunity presented by PLSLP to design an intervention that could achieve demonstrable improvements in students' literacy and language learning within participating schools while also demonstrating the viability of developing local improvement networks through a co-design approach that is contextualised, evidence-based, and that can achieve sustained improvements in learning beyond the finite injection of aid funds or 'expert' resources. A design-based implementation research (DBIR) methodology was proposed, broadly defined by key features of: collaboration between researchers and practitioners; situated in a real educational context; focused on an urgent issue of practice to advance valued student outcomes; evidence-based with iterative cycles of data collection and problem solving to design, test and implement a significant intervention (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Fishman, Penuel, Allen, Cheng & Sabelli, 2013).

[1] The programme was implemented after approval by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee.

THEORETICAL FRAME

This section describes the key elements of the theoretical framework underpinning the design of PLSLP, drawing on educational, improvement science and international development literature. The perspectives within these research fields reflect the varied knowledge base required in an international development intervention that is designed to improve learning for children through teacher professional learning and schooling improvement.

Considered from an Ecological Systems Theory perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), children's development can be considered to be the ongoing and mutually constitutive interaction between the active child and the changing properties of her settings over time. In terms of any efforts towards describing how learning occurs in a particular context, there is a need to understand the changing nature of the learning environment for children as well as the changes in their development within that environment. Importantly, however, the mechanisms for learning reside in the mutually constitutive interactions between the child and her environment and the processes that occur in that interaction. So, understanding learning in a given context would also seek to identify those processes. Bronfenbrenner (1992) calls this a 'Process-Person-Context' Model of research design. This ecological model therefore situates children's learning within the specific changing context and provides a focus for understanding the contextual nature of children's learning.

A further implication of the ecological perspective is the significant role of other people in a context, their beliefs and values as well as their actions, to the development of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). In a schooling intervention, this highlights the role of the teacher, the beliefs she may have about the developing child, the beliefs about learning and literacy more generally and the teaching actions she may undertake. In a schooling improvement context, these beliefs would also include values about what might count as a problem and what might count as improvement for the child. This aspect of the ecological perspective coheres with what is known about professional learning more generally: that for professional learning to have an effect, it needs to engage with teachers' beliefs about learning, and learners (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2008).

Therefore, to develop an intervention that improves outcomes for learners, a design is required that builds theoretical and empirical understanding about the relationship between child and her learning environment, and that enables other people (i.e. teachers) in the child's environment to interact with the developing child in ways that alter learning processes beneficially over time. In other words, the intervention should enable teachers to recognise more accurately the relationship between their own practice (teaching) and their students' learning, and act on this understanding to change their practice to advance student learning. In such a way, the approach might also be considered to take an ecological approach to teachers' learning by situating professional learning within the specific context. In addition to benefits for the professional learning of individual teachers, the ongoing analysis and response inherent in such an approach has been termed 'improvement science', with an intervention logic that seeks to develop a systemic and organised method of learning to improve (Bryk, 2015).

Such a research model is germane to international aid efforts to intervene in learning environments in 'developing' nations, where contextual variability, local capability-building, and sustainability are key concerns. Context is a source of fundamental tension in international aid. The international aid system is premised on the assumption that knowledge and practice from one (developed) space can be transferred and applied to achieve similar

ends in another (less developed). This is most obvious at the level of global agencies such as the World Bank and United Nations' agencies who drive a particular education agenda at the global level that both determines what the priority problems are and applies 'best practice' solutions regardless of contextual difference (Coxon & Munce, 2008; Crossley, 2010; Pritchett & Sandefur, 2013). The international development system in general, as Mosse argues, "emphasizes universal over contextual knowledge, a knowledge system that is deductive and oriented to general predictive models, and that constantly organizes attention away from the contingencies of practice and the plurality of perspectives" (Mosse, 2011, p. 87).

However, an implication of the Ecological Systems theory, and indeed a repeated finding of studies which examine the relationship of context and cognition, is that context can be considered to be a constituent of cognition (see, for example, Ceci, Bronfenbrenner, & Baker, 1988). If this context-specific nature of cognition is taken seriously in international aid interventions, then any intention to introduce best practice or evidence informed approaches to teaching in developing nations is unlikely to succeed without a strong theoretical and empirical basis for understanding the relationships between the given context, learning processes and children's outcomes in that context.

In saying this, we take context to be an emergent property of the dynamic interactions between people, actions, ideas, and material conditions. Context in this sense is "a process or set of relations, not a thing in itself" (Dilley, 1999, p.5). Typically, in the design of aid interventions, context is treated as a collection of features of a space in time, which can be described, categorised, and then managed (Stephens, 2007). In contrast, we argue context is an inherently relational and therefore political, lived dynamic that must be negotiated in an ongoing way. Contextualised interventions, therefore, should provide for ongoing, iterative engagement and reflection about the dynamic interactions of the context, involving both researchers and practitioners, and allow intervention design to flow from these. Co-design provides a mechanism for doing so.

This leads to a final thread in our theoretical framework that we wish to highlight here by acknowledging the multitude of dynamic interactions within a given school context. The complexity of any school context requires a shift in focus from teachers' learning at an individual level to learning and change at an organisational level. In designing interventions to bring about change within school environments, we argue that schools need to be recognised as complex systems, involving multiple agents with varied interests and power, in which change in any direction emerges from endogenous processes of development and adaptation (Jörg, Davisc & Nickmans, 2007; Snyder, 2013). The implication of this is the relevance of a collective-action approach to intervening in schooling environments, which suggests that achieving change is best solved through an intervention approach that focuses on locally defined problems, adopts iterative design principles of experimentation and tight feedback loops to encourage experiential learning, and engages multiple agents to build legitimacy, relevance and political viability (e.g. Booth, 2011; Andrews, Woolcock & Pritchett, 2012). This differs from the more common models prevalent in international aid interventions reliant on economic constructs, where achieving improving service delivery is seen as a principal-agent, supply-demand problem. When combined with the preference within international aid for general predictive models and the influence of managerial solutions, this focus on principal-agent directionality has generated interventions that impose top-down reforms and often punitive accountability strategies based on the premise that

enforcing accountability motivates performance, and that principals and agents each act and react uniformly.

In summary, based on the combination of theoretical perspectives outlined above, we argue that improving learning at the school level requires the development of contextually-specific 'improvement networks' that work through collective and iterative processes of problem-solving based on local evidence.

THE INTERVENTION APPROACH

The claim developed in this article is that a research and intervention approach is needed that creates conditions for implementing an as-yet-unknown set of changes to teaching and schooling practices in ways that are demonstrably effective for children within the dynamic context. Internationally, such an approach has been described as Design Based Implementation Research (DBIR). Fishman, Penuel, Allen, Cheng and Sabelli (2013) characterise the approach as having key features required of a contextualised intervention design, in that there is a commitment to addressing persistent problems, from multiple perspectives, using collaborative design. Further, the approach advances the dual aims of developing knowledge related to classroom learning (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012) while also developing knowledge of how best to implement changes. Finally, imperative in international aid work is the need to develop capacity in the system for sustaining changes within ever-changing contexts and also continuing to change in ways that are considered an improvement (Bryk 2015; Fishman, et al., 2013).

The shift in the nature of the research design to building new contextualized understandings requires an attendant shift in relational understandings between researchers and practitioners. Snow (2015) describes the redefinition of the roles of researchers and practitioners in applied contexts, which she labels Practice Embedded Educational Research, as acknowledging and valuing the 'dual knowledge sources' of research and practice as contributing to the intervention design and implementation. In the international aid context in cross-national settings, the 'knowledge sources' acknowledged are also contextual. Thus, the partnership model in the programme of work has been described as a 'weaving model' of design (Veikune & Spratt, 2016), acknowledging the multiple knowledge sources of in-country researchers and academics; external researchers and academics; external practitioners and facilitators, and in-country practitioners, teachers, leaders and Ministry personnel. The notion of co-design relies on such positioning, founded firmly on practice knowledge and local knowledge. The DBIR agenda is thus one of co-development of knowledge, rather than knowledge transfer, and positions participants as co-designers of the intervention through professional learning communities, rather than recipients of professional development through workshops.

COROLLARIES OF THE CO-DESIGN APPROACH FOR INTERVENTION METHODOLOGY

The co-design approach has been expressed throughout the development and implementation of the specific intervention approach for PLSLP. In this section, the phases of the approach are illustrated as they apply to literacy development in 42 schools in three Pacific Island nations. The design-based approach that we call the Learning Schools Model (McNaughton, Lai, Jesson & WIlson; McNaughton & Lai, 2009) formed the process of iterative design. Using the model, the intervention was developed and implemented using a

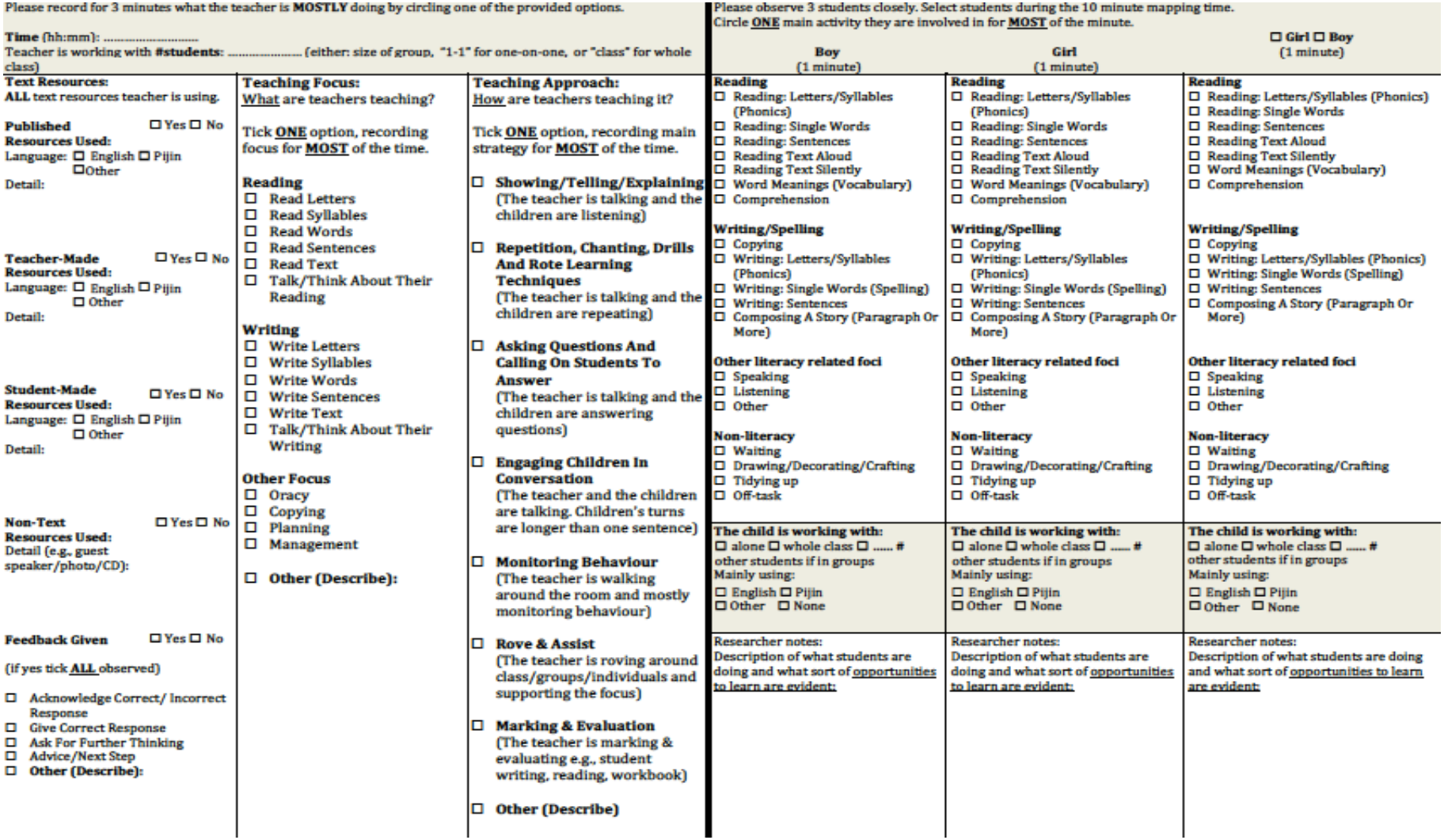
phased approach, with profiling, implementation and sustainability phases built into the iterations. Within each phase, evidence about student achievement, patterns of teaching, and school practices were collected, using descriptive (rather than evaluative) observation and interview procedures. These data offered the opportunity for teachers and researchers to co-design, that is, to: engage in discussion and debate about the perceived relationships between the teaching patterns and the learning patterns within each context; to develop hypotheses and shared understandings about the elements of effectiveness and what change in practice was needed.

The profiling phase

In traditional terms, the profiling phase was concerned with collecting baseline data about the teaching practice, the learning processes and the learning outcomes. In terms of the 'Process-Person-Context' Model however, the profiling phase also served to build understandings amongst teachers and the in-country team about the interactions between teaching and learning in each context. In terms of co-design, the sources of data relevant in each country were negotiated between in-country and external researchers and practitioners. In each country, the profile included the collection of country level student achievement statistics (standardised test scores) for the country as a whole, and where available for the students in the participating schools. Where possible, teacher assessments about literacy were also collected, and teacher interviews with observed teachers were conducted. Tools for the collection of the data were co-designed in order to ask context relevant questions and observe context relevant aspects of practice. The classroom observation formats and interview protocols were developed in a workshop session hosted by the University of the South Pacific and involving UOA team members and in-country team members from the three participating countries. In total 11 academics from four countries participated in the two day co-design workshop.

In order that classroom observations provided an overall picture of the patterns of instruction in the context, a time sampling method of observation was employed. For the first 10 minutes of any observation, observers drew a map of the classroom, and noted resources on display or accessible. This initial 10 minute phase offered a settling in period for the observation, where observers were looking around the room, at walls, books and any other resources, and therefore were not focussed on the teacher, at least at first. Following the classroom mapping, observers alternated between focussing on teaching practices for a three minute interval, then observed the learning processes engaged in by three randomly selected students for a minute each. This sampling cycle was repeated six times, culminating in six intervals of observed teaching (18 minutes per teacher) and 6 minutes each for three children (18 minutes in total).

Observations were conducted by external and in country academics and facilitators, using post observation debriefing and moderation to ensure consistency. Profiling data collection visits were conducted for between two and three weeks by a team of four or five in each country, and consisted of classroom observations in sample year levels, debriefing discussions with observed teachers, interviews with non-observed teachers and interviews with leaders. The observation format is included in Figure 1. It was designed to be descriptive (rather than evaluative) and as low-inference as possible. For the interval focussed on the teacher, observers noted which texts were used, what the teaching focus was, the number of students the teacher was working with, the nature of the feedback given and the teaching approach used. For each interval focussed on a child, observers noted what they were engaged in, how many children they were working with and what language, if any,



Please record for 3 minutes what the teacher is **MOSTLY** doing by circling one of the provided options.

Time (hh:mm): .....
Teacher is working with **#students**: ..... (either: size of group, "1-1" for one-on-one, or "class" for whole class)

Text Resources:
ALL text resources teacher is using.

Published Resources Used: ☐ Yes ☐ No
Language: ☐ English ☐ Pijin ☐ Other
Detail:

Teacher-Made Resources Used: ☐ Yes ☐ No
Language: ☐ English ☐ Pijin ☐ Other
Detail:

Student-Made Resources Used: ☐ Yes ☐ No
Language: ☐ English ☐ Pijin ☐ Other
Detail:

Non-Text Resources Used: ☐ Yes ☐ No
Detail (e.g., guest speaker/photo/CD):

Feedback Given ☐ Yes ☐ No
(If yes tick **ALL** observed)

- ☐ Acknowledge Correct/ Incorrect Response
- ☐ Give Correct Response
- ☐ Ask For Further Thinking
- ☐ Advice/Next Step
- ☐ **Other (Describe):**

Teaching Focus:
What are teachers teaching?

Tick **ONE** option, recording focus for **MOST** of the time.

Reading
- ☐ Read Letters
- ☐ Read Syllables
- ☐ Read Words
- ☐ Read Sentences
- ☐ Read Text
- ☐ Talk/Think About Their Reading

Writing
- ☐ Write Letters
- ☐ Write Syllables
- ☐ Write Words
- ☐ Write Sentences
- ☐ Write Text
- ☐ Talk/Think About Their Writing

Other Focus
- ☐ Oracy
- ☐ Copying
- ☐ Planning
- ☐ Management

- ☐ **Other (Describe):**

Teaching Approach:
How are teachers teaching it?

Tick **ONE** option, recording main strategy for **MOST** of the time.

- ☐ **Showing/Telling/Explaining** (The teacher is talking and the children are listening)
- ☐ **Repetition, Chanting, Drills And Rote Learning Techniques** (The teacher is talking and the children are repeating)
- ☐ **Asking Questions And Calling On Students To Answer** (The teacher is talking and the children are answering questions)
- ☐ **Engaging Children In Conversation** (The teacher and the children are talking. Children's turns are longer than one sentence)
- ☐ **Monitoring Behaviour** (The teacher is walking around the room and mostly monitoring behaviour)
- ☐ **Rove & Assist** (The teacher is roving around class/groups/individuals and supporting the focus)
- ☐ **Marking & Evaluation** (The teacher is marking & evaluating e.g., student writing, reading, workbook)
- ☐ **Other (Describe)**

Please observe 3 students closely. Select students during the 10 minute mapping time.
Circle **ONE** main activity they are involved in for **MOST** of the minute.

Boy (1 minute)	**Girl** (1 minute)	☐ **Girl** ☐ **Boy** (1 minute)
Reading ☐ Reading: Letters/Syllables (Phonics) ☐ Reading: Single Words ☐ Reading: Sentences ☐ Reading Text Aloud ☐ Reading Text Silently ☐ Word Meanings (Vocabulary) ☐ Comprehension	**Reading** ☐ Reading: Letters/Syllables (Phonics) ☐ Reading: Single Words ☐ Reading: Sentences ☐ Reading Text Aloud ☐ Reading Text Silently ☐ Word Meanings (Vocabulary) ☐ Comprehension	**Reading** ☐ Reading: Letters/Syllables (Phonics) ☐ Reading: Single Words ☐ Reading: Sentences ☐ Reading Text Aloud ☐ Reading Text Silently ☐ Word Meanings (Vocabulary) ☐ Comprehension
Writing/Spelling ☐ Copying ☐ Writing: Letters/Syllables (Phonics) ☐ Writing: Single Words (Spelling) ☐ Writing: Sentences ☐ Composing A Story (Paragraph Or More)	**Writing/Spelling** ☐ Copying ☐ Writing: Letters/Syllables (Phonics) ☐ Writing: Single Words (Spelling) ☐ Writing: Sentences ☐ Composing A Story (Paragraph Or More)	**Writing/Spelling** ☐ Copying ☐ Writing: Letters/Syllables (Phonics) ☐ Writing: Single Words (Spelling) ☐ Writing: Sentences ☐ Composing A Story (Paragraph Or More)
Other literacy related foci ☐ Speaking ☐ Listening ☐ Other	**Other literacy related foci** ☐ Speaking ☐ Listening ☐ Other	**Other literacy related foci** ☐ Speaking ☐ Listening ☐ Other
Non-literacy ☐ Waiting ☐ Drawing/Decorating/Crafting ☐ Tidying up ☐ Off-task	**Non-literacy** ☐ Waiting ☐ Drawing/Decorating/Crafting ☐ Tidying up ☐ Off-task	**Non-literacy** ☐ Waiting ☐ Drawing/Decorating/Crafting ☐ Tidying up ☐ Off-task
The child is working with: ☐ alone ☐ whole class ☐ ..... # other students if in groups Mainly using: ☐ English ☐ Pijin ☐ Other ☐ None	**The child is working with:** ☐ alone ☐ whole class ☐ ..... # other students if in groups Mainly using: ☐ English ☐ Pijin ☐ Other ☐ None	**The child is working with:** ☐ alone ☐ whole class ☐ ..... # other students if in groups Mainly using: ☐ English ☐ Pijin ☐ Other ☐ None
Researcher notes: Description of what students are doing and what sort of opportunities to learn are evident:	Researcher notes: Description of what students are doing and what sort of opportunities to learn are evident:	Researcher notes: Description of what students are doing and what sort of opportunities to learn are evident:

Figure 1. Sample of classroom observation format

they were using. Pre-coded categories were posited initially at the workshop, and then refined through trialling in each country.

The development of understandings about the patterns of teaching and learning and the relationships between the two were sought in discussions between participants about the data in terms of the patterns observed in profiling. The initial descriptive analyses of the data collected in the profiling phase were used as the basis for 'sense-making' between participants. The 'sense-making' sessions occurred as the initial Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings in each country with teachers and leaders from the participating schools (for a review of the features of PLC see Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). At these sessions the observation, interview and student achievement data were discussed, and importantly, the relationships between teachers' actions (and use of resources), learning processes and learning outcomes were theorised. Teachers and leaders attended for a day long workshop, in geographically similar school groups. The shared development of theories was therefore a feature of the design, identifying participants' understandings about constraints and enablers in context, desired changes to outcomes, and how these changes in outcomes would be the result of changes in learning processes and therefore teaching actions. The outcome of the sense making sessions was to develop theoretically explicit hypotheses about how the desired changes to students' outcomes might be achieved.

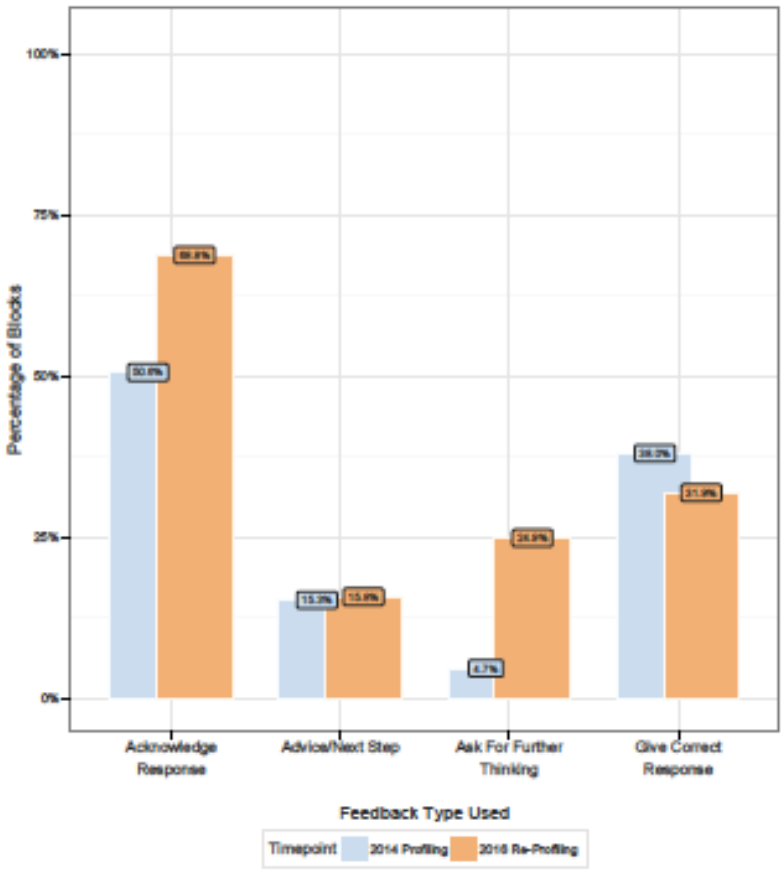


Figure 2. Types of feedback observed across two years

The sense making sessions in each country can be conceived as 'data discussions' which, given the right conditions, have the potential to refine practice in ways that promote increases in student learning (Schildkamp, Lai & Earl, 2013). Through joint analysis of data, it was intended that teachers' knowledge is broadened and deepened by reflecting on their practice, using the data about teaching as an artefact to drive that reflection, and using the data about student learning to drive purposeful inquiry. Using the classroom observation data as artefact offered both a mirror for reflection, but also a window into alternative approaches. The use of the agreed, precoded categories, and the resulting analysis of those categories, for example, allowed teachers to discuss alternatives to current practice based on the data. An example of this is shown in Figure 2. In this example, the quantities of different feedback types observed are displayed, indicating few instances of teachers giving 'advice or next steps'. In this way, alternatives to current practice were a feature of the artefact, and are discussed as possibilities for desired shift.

Hypothesis generation

The outcome of the sense making process was the development of contextually appropriate hypotheses. These hypotheses were designed to engage with teachers' beliefs about the relationships between teaching and learning, as well as provide an intervention logic to test. In each of the three countries, the hypotheses were instantiated as changes that teachers would make to their practice, which would result in different types of participation or noticing from students, which would result in changes to learning outcomes. For example, in one country, the agreed shifts can be expressed in the following hypothesis: *if teachers highlight the use of letters and words to make meaning, students will have opportunities to compose personally meaningful stories, thus supporting their ability to write independently*. The shared agreement of the desired shifts to learning and the desired shifts in practice became the substance of the intervention in each country.

The implementation phase

Implementing the desired changes was the focus of the second yearlong phase of the programme. In this phase, questions about the best systems to support teachers to change, and resources needed to do so were investigated, again through co-design. In each country, this entailed the development of teacher in-class assessment tools, the design of meeting structures to support opportunities for Professional Learning Communities and the development of texts to support the teachers' literacy focus.

Teacher administered classroom assessment tools were designed in each country. Each was designed to allow teachers to identify student need and respond appropriately. Such tools included writing exemplars, rubrics, reading comprehension assessments and a 'read and retell' matrix for teachers. Each was co-designed by the in-country and external academic teams in a week long tool development workshop and trialled with teachers to investigate how the use of the tool might support teaching.

Teaching resources were also co-designed to support the focus in each country. In each country, the in country team identified what resources were already within the context, and where different resourcing might support the planned refinements to practice. The nature of texts required to meet that need were identified by the in-country teams, in consultation with external academics and publishers, and a subteam to develop them in each country was constituted. Examples of resources included wordless picture books that supported meaning making, use of language and story-retelling; home language readers to support first language development and literacy; dual language readers to support the addition of English language

and literacy, and non fiction texts with thematic links to existing curriculum texts to support depth of concept development through language.

Meetings of the Professional Learning Communities were co-facilitated by in-country and external teams four to five times each year. At each meeting participants ideally worked to seek shared understandings about how tools and texts were used, what types of teaching activities worked well in context; how teachers knew that activities were working to change learning processes, whether changes constituted improvement for learners, and how to organise resources and systems so that the most effective teaching activities could be taken up by other teachers. In one country, local variation meant that in addition to meetings, the local facilitator held an 'in office' day once a week, where teachers could come and be supported with making resources and developing lesson plans. In other countries, PLCs were supplemented with classroom visits and co-teaching by in country facilitators and academics.

Sustainability

Integral to the co-design of an intervention is a shared understanding of what might continue to operate within a context without the support of external teams. In the case of the three countries in the programme, the intent was to develop capability within the system to continue to improve the educational provision in country through the development of what might be considered 'improvement networks' (Bryk, 2015). For the intervention in each country, local facilitator and academic input was an essential part of the improvement network for schools. Thus, sustainability is likely to require the ongoing function of 'local' academics (which may be in-country based or regional as in the case of USP) to work in partnership with schools.

Based on the theoretical framework of the approach however, the dynamic and complex nature of context becomes an integral feature of any consideration of what might be sustained in each country. Within an improvement-focused approach to intervention, itself a dynamic process, the focus for sustainability of the design based intervention becomes the design, development and embedding of systems and processes to support ongoing teacher learning to promote student learning. Thus, within PLSLP, the approach to sustainability is not to seek an end-point where all teachers are trained and all students are learning at optimum levels, rather it is to work collectively towards a point where capability exists organisationally for a focus on continuous improvement with students' learning as the key goal for schools. As we enter the third and last year of implementation of PLSLP, we are working to gradually reduce the input of the external (University of Auckland based) support and to work with participating Ministries to ensure sources of ongoing resourcing for maintaining the local improvement networks beyond the end of the PLSLP funding. Therefore, the test of the PLSLP approach will come in 2018, when the participating schools, local academic partners and Ministries are left to maintain their local improvement networks and the processes associated with them, independently of external resourcing.

DISCUSSION

The approach to international aid intervention design which we have taken draws on theoretical principles from education, schooling improvement and international aid, all of which cohere in acknowledging the dynamic, complex and constitutive nature of context for the learning of children, the professional development of teachers and the improvement of educational provision. Taken seriously, the acknowledgement of context within any design

results in a level of indeterminacy which needs to be accommodated within an intervention structure that is purposely designed to support improvement. Therefore a number of tensions exist between a pre-designed structure and implementation flexibility within a co-designed approach. Consideration of these tensions is needed to consider how the design based approach might contribute theoretically and in ways that have generalisability.

The first such tension is with the notion of treatment fidelity, in which adherence to the planned intervention is assessed (Smith, Daunic & Taylor, 2007). Classic intervention design would require checks of implementation to see whether the changes made to instruction were those that were planned, and whether outcomes are related to the degree to which the changes were implemented as planned. Because the PLSLP approach is specifically designed to be context specific, it becomes paradoxical to assess whether an intervention is 'working' in a specific or pre-determined way, and therefore likely to succeed. Our approach to addressing this issue has been the development of shared hypotheses in each country, which were co-designed and which were subsequently tested through changes in teaching approach supported by targeted resourcing. Thus the question of whether the intervention is succeeding is negotiated in response to data collection within each phase, in 'sense making' data discussions within Professional Learning Communities. The use of shared hypotheses enables testing of a theoretical principle within a specific context. Observation data are descriptive, and used formatively, in order that participants consider how their collective patterns on instruction might contribute to the students' learning. These discussions are designed as a vehicle by which teachers consider their collective patterns of instruction, offering both a reflective mirror on current practice, and a window into possibilities for changes to practice.

Similarly, there is a tension with the notion of replication or 'scale up' within a co-designed, context specific approach. The assumption that 'successful' interventions in one context can be transferred and replicated in other contexts, whether within the same country or across national borders, is pervasive in international aid. Taking context seriously means that we focus on replication of a process of co-design, and on testing interventions within context, rather than on the exact replication of a design product. We argue that replication of the co-design approach to produce context-responsive interventions is possible, and allows a form of 'scale-up' that can support change across a system. However, the challenges and feasibility of managing such processes across a whole system are not yet researched.

Another tension is with the notion of 'evidence based practice' in order to determine whether changes to teaching are likely to be beneficial for student learning. Within PLSLP, the response to this issue is to draw on external and in country academic expertise, alongside the practice knowledge of those working with children to identify, and then scale, practices which are proving to be effective in context. Through data discussions in Professional Learning Communities, people with differing expertise consider descriptive evidence about teaching patterns and the relationships with learning processes and patterns. Thus the approach focusses on the function and outcomes of changes within the context, rather than imposing a set form of 'best practice' to be sought or replicated. In this way, the learning processes of children become the focus for the learning conversations between teachers, building the opportunity for contextually embedded learning for teachers.

In conclusion, we have argued here that in order to take seriously the need to develop a context specific international aid intervention, PLSLP has sought to acknowledge context as a dynamic and mutually constitutive part of the learning processes of children, of teachers and of complex systems such as schools. In order to embed context within an intervention

design, we have employed a Design Based Implementation Research framework, explicitly co-designing each phase of the iterative intervention to respond to the teaching and learning needs in each country, and acknowledging the multiple expertises required in such an endeavour. This approach is driven by a primary interest in what works best for whom and where, rather than what works best regardless of whom and where. As such, the concern for sustainability and for scale-up that dominates most aid interventions becomes an issue of building sustainable local improvement networks able to continue a contextually-driven process of collective problem solving for improvement.

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Competing visions of education in Timor-Leste's curriculum reform

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Timor-Leste's independence in 2002 marked the end of centuries of foreign control. Early post-independence education reforms successfully increased school enrolments and rebuilt education infrastructure, however, teacher qualifications and student outcomes have remained poor. The current Curriculum Reform, initiated in 2013, aims to improve educational quality in the first six years of schooling by adapting international best practices to the Timorese context, fundamentally reshaping the curriculum's approach to language, content and pedagogy. Located at the intersection of current debates in the anthropologies of education and international development, this paper examines how diverse educational actors in Timor-Leste translate Curriculum Reform policy into practice. The research draws on two months of ethnographic fieldwork in the capital, Dili, and on the author's professional experience as editor of the Curriculum Reform. The key finding is that, while all actors share a common goal of creating a quality education system that contributes to Timor-Leste's development, school and reform staff translate policy into practice in inconsistent ways. The paper argues that these inconsistencies are the result of the actors' divergent visions of education, their working conditions, and their unequal access to information about the reform. These factors are compared across the reform pillars of language, curriculum content, and pedagogy for those who create policy (reform staff) and those who are tasked with implementing it (school staff).

Keywords: Timor-Leste; curriculum reform; localization; visions of education

INTRODUCTION

> While the goals of the Strategic Development Plan are consistent with the Millennium Development Goals, they are tailored to reflect the unique history, culture and heritage of Timor-Leste . . . Our vision is that all Timorese children should attend school and receive a quality education that gives them the knowledge and skills to lead healthy, productive lives and to actively contribute to our nation's development. *Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2011–2030* (RDTL, 2011a, p. 16)

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The small state of Timor-Leste (East Timor) shares an island with Indonesian West Timor and has a population of approximately 1.2 million people. Timor-Leste became independent in 2002 following centuries of Portuguese colonization (early 1500–1975), a 24-year Indonesian military occupation (1975–1999), and three years of United Nations administration (1999–2002). These eras of foreign control also delineated the periods of pre-independence education (Beck, 2008; Nicolai, 2004; Shah & Quinn, 2014), characterized by the imposition of a foreign schooling system that prioritized 'colonial epistemologies' (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2016, p. 4) over local knowledge systems. Bequeathed this legacy of foreign schooling in a razed country, Timor-Leste has faced enormous challenges in (re)building its education system. These challenges have been further exacerbated by dwindling oil reserves in an oil-dependent economy, a lack of local industry, and a huge youth population experiencing high rates of unemployment. Due to the focus on rebuilding infrastructure, replenishing the depleted teaching force, and getting children back to school in the years immediately after independence, early curricula interventions remained dependent on foreign assistance and were minimally adapted to Timorese culture and conditions (Beck, 2008; Quinn, 2013; Shah, 2012).

In 2013, the Ministry of Education initiated the current Curriculum Reform of the first and second 'cycles', which comprise the first six of nine grades of 'universal, compulsory and free' basic education (RDTL, 2011b, p. 9). Managed and funded by the Ministry, with some international donor support, the reform aims to improve educational outcomes by creating a uniquely Timorese education system and enabling young citizens to contribute to the development of the sovereign nation and make it competitive in the global economy (RDTL, 2011a). It does this by both 'internationalizing' teaching with global 'best practices', such as learner-centered pedagogy and language-progression methodologies, and 'localizing' education through the use of local language and content relevant to Timorese culture, history, and the environment. These aims are not new for Timor-Leste: curricular programs since independence have sought to capitalize on the potential of education to build national unity and identity, create a locally relevant curriculum, and introduce learner-centered pedagogy (Shah, 2012; Shah & Quinn, 2014). However, the 2013 Curriculum Reform is the first curriculum to be completely developed in-country and represents an unprecedented investment in curriculum development by the Timorese Ministry of Education.

The Ministry formed a team specifically for the project, of which I was part from August 2014 to March 2017. The team included Timorese teachers on secondment from schools, Timorese consultants with higher education (often from Australia, New Zealand, and Indonesia), and 'international' (mostly American, Australian and Portuguese) consultants with specialist subject knowledge. The team has produced new curricula for eight subjects, scripted lesson plans for teachers, and various educational materials, including textbooks, posters, and even a literacy TV show. Ongoing consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including teachers, civil society, development partners, religious leaders, veterans, academics and other national figures, informed the development of the curriculum and, in particular, the content of the scripted lesson plans and textbooks. Phased implementation introduced the curriculum to two of the six primary-school grades annually between 2015 and 2017.

Drawing on two months of ethnographic fieldwork in early 2016 and my professional experience as the editor of the Curriculum Reform, this article is a summary of a larger thesis, which included text and an ethnographic film (Ogden, 2016). This article outlines

how competing logics of internationalization and localization between the reform team and primary schools play out in the development and early implementation of the Curriculum Reform across three of its pillars: language, content, and pedagogy.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The tension between global education policy and the localization of national education policy has been thoroughly debated in the anthropology of education and comparative and international education for several years (e.g., Anderson-Levitt, 2003). Localization––the contextualization of global policies to unique national realities—has become an international trend; however, the implementation of localized policies has not been a magic solution for the problems they address (e.g., Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Mosse, 2004; Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2016). The translation of policy into practice remains complex and anything but linear, and several authors have debated whether education reform really happens at the policy level or inside classrooms (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Paine & Zeichner, 2012; Verger, Novelli & Altinyelken, 2015). Given the prevalence of localization policies within the 'developing' world, debates from the anthropology of international development are also relevant, including those analyzing the relationship between the formulation of policy and the social realities of its implementation (Crewe & Axelby, 2013; Mosse, 2005, 2006, 2013; Olivier de Sardan, 2005). This article adds a recent Timorese case study to these debates. Below, I define the five main concepts drawn from the literature that shape my argument: visions of education, working environments, communications, policy, and appropriation.

Visions of education here refers to the individual and collective bundles of ideas about, to paraphrase Paine and Zeichner (2012, p. 577), the value and purpose of schooling, what knowledge is valuable and necessary, and what effective teaching and learning consist of. The concept also draws on the notions of 'epistemological diversity' (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012), which underpins individuals' and institutions' understandings and enactments of educational ideas, and 'voice' (Juffermans & Van der Aa, 2013), which, in educational discourses, contains both ideologies about education and actors' personal histories and contexts.

The following two concepts, working environments and communications, are two primary aspects of the reform's implementation context. Working environments comprise the set of material, professional and social resources available to actors that shape both their visions of education and the practical parameters within which they interpret and enact educational policy (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2016; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012). They include factors like the physical condition of working environments, access to materials, exposure to and contact with foreigners (and by extension, foreign ideas and systems), and the presence and use of technology. Communications media and practices here refer to the set of mechanisms that convey the Curriculum Reform to actors, and the information those mechanisms convey. They include office meetings, trimestral week-long teacher training, lesson-plan manuals, syllabuses and other printed reform materials, politicians' statements, and newspaper articles about education, as well as word of mouth. The concept incorporates the form and content, as well as the context of reception of these communication media and practices. For example, the premise that Timor-Leste has an 'oral culture' rather than a literate tradition has implications for the effectiveness of the printed Curriculum Reform materials provided to school actors.

Policy is an amorphous concept that many authors use to reference overarching trends and principles, vision and values, management systems, and learning processes (e.g., Verger et al., 2015), while others expand that definition to also include the detailed minutiae that such policies produce (e.g., Mosse, 2004). Here, I follow Mosse's (2004) broader conception of policy to refer to both the guiding principles of the Curriculum Reform (e.g., localization and learner-centered pedagogy), its specific strategies and designs (e.g., the curriculum itself) and its supplementary materials (e.g., lesson-plan manuals).

Finally, I use appropriation to refer to the ways in which educational actors understand, adapt, and enact education policies through their own visions of education and within their contextual parameters. In the literature, appropriation refers to the myriad ways in which transnational policies are adapted to diverse local discursive and material contexts (e.g., Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012). It is the process of translating policy into practice across various scales (international to national to local), often with unexpected or unintended consequences (e.g., Paine & Zeichner, 2012; Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2016; Verger et al., 2015). These unintended outcomes are not purely the result of the misunderstanding or miscommunication of policies: actors also deliberately resist or selectively implement policies in line with their own interests and visions of education, especially when they perceive policies as being unfairly imposed (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014; Lopes Cardozo, 2012; Olivier de Sardan, 2005).

METHODOLODY

I conducted fieldwork in two main sites in the capital, Dili: the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Reform office and one focal primary school with 1,200 students and 27 teachers. For comparison, I visited two other primary schools for a half-day each. I employed qualitative research methods, which Bartlett & Vavrus argue are particularly valuable for researching educational policy due to 'their ability to move beyond the professed aims of policy to examine how policies are made and contested at various levels' (2014, p. 140). These methods included participant observation of general work activities and staff meetings in the reform office and in the staffroom and playground of the focal school; 37 semi-structured interviews using a core set of questions (18 with reform staff, 13 with school staff from the 3 schools, 3 with Ministry of Education officials and consultants, and 3 with donor representatives); 19 classroom observations of grades 1, 2 and 3 across the 3 schools, to encompass teachers using the new curriculum for both the first and second year; analysis of government documents and reform materials; and audiovisual recordings at the reform office and focal school.

The research was conducted mostly in Tetun and English, with some Portuguese, depending on the primary language and preference of each participant, and I translated all dialogue and texts. The diversity of my research participants, including teachers and school coordinators (principals), Timorese ('national') and foreign ('international') Curriculum Reform staff, politicians, and international donor representatives, reflected a comparative, multi-scalar approach across various levels of policy and practice, inspired by Vavrus and Bartlett's (2014) Vertical Case Study approach. The two primary groups of research participants, Curriculum Reform staff and school staff, are the focus of this paper.

I analyzed my ethnographic data by coding interview transcripts, participant observation notes and classroom observation notes by key themes (e.g., localization, language, visions of education, pedagogy) and comparing these themes across participants and sites. Basic statistics from classroom observations were compiled across various criteria (including class size, time allocations to subjects, teacher dialogue, activity type, spatial arrangement, use of lesson plans, language use, etc.). My continued professional involvement on the Curriculum Reform throughout all research stages created a dialogic dynamic, providing examples and counter-examples of the themes and trends in the fieldwork data.

My role as the Curriculum Reform's editor involved copyediting curricula, storybooks and thousands of lesson plans in Tetun across the six basic-education grades. I am not a trained educator; rather, I came to work in education programs through my background in editing and organizational development in Timor-Leste. While my role on the Curriculum Reform centered around ensuring stylistic consistency across all reform materials, it sometimes involved providing feedback on content and pedagogy. However, I was not responsible for writing materials, nor was I involved in the development of policy or curricula.

My professional involvement in the Curriculum Reform had significant ramifications on my research of it. What Mosse (2006) describes as 'insider ethnography' is not unusual in education research and has its benefits and drawbacks. Each role informs and reshapes the other, and these blurred lines between pure and applied anthropology (McNess, Arthur & Crossley, 2015) are gaining increasing academic acceptance as productive and valid (Crewe & Axelby, 2013; Mosse, 2013).

My hybrid position had both methodological and ethical implications for the research. Methodologically, it engendered trust with some participants, while erecting barriers with others. Ethically, it forced me to reckon with the impact on my professional relationships of my subjects' diverse and contradictory perspectives (McNess et al., 2015; Mosse, 2006) and demanded constant vigilance about the potential impact of my professional biases on my academic output (Crewe & Axelby, 2013, p. 43). Ultimately, each position complemented and challenged the assumptions of the other, enriching the resulting ethnography.

VISIONS OF EDUCATION

In what follows, I outline the school and reform visions of education through descriptions of how each group of actors engages with language, content, and pedagogy in the Curriculum Reform. However, these are polarized extremes of what is really a spectrum of visions. Describing these extremes facilitates comparisons across general trends, but each actor occupies a nuanced position along the spectrum. The main contextual factors that I identified as shaping these positions include actors' skills and knowledge, material constraints, and the communication of reform policy and materials. I now briefly outline how these factors affect teachers' appropriations of the reform policy in practice, and specific examples are provided in the sections below.

With an education system still playing catch-up following the decimation of infrastructure and contraction of the teaching force in 1999, a significant proportion of Timor-Leste's teachers have minimal qualifications. Quinn (2013), referring to government data, writes that 'over 23% of teachers have no teacher qualification . . . and 11% have a post-secondary qualification in teacher training' (p. 184). In 2011, '[m]ore than 75% of

teachers [were] not qualified to the levels required by law (RDTL, 2011a, p. 21). These statistics resonated with my fieldwork observations: many teachers had not mastered the content they were teaching. This long-standing issue is now compounded by the transmission of the curriculum content through lesson-plan manuals. Every trimester of each grade has a lesson-plan manual, often more than 800 pages long. The rationale for using scripted lesson plans is that they provide daily in-service support in a context of inadequate training and under-qualification. However, the sheer volume of written material for teachers to read is intimidating, especially in what many reform actors described as an 'oral culture' with a relatively new literate tradition. The dilemma of how to bridge the gaps between teacher knowledge and skills, and the new curriculum are widely acknowledged by reform staff.

Even when teachers do have sufficient academic skills to teach the new curriculum contents, material constraints make this difficult. Classroom overcrowding was identified as an implementation challenge by more than half the school actors I interviewed. Two of the schools I visited had an average of 40 students per class; the other had an average of 50. Some classrooms I observed had more than 60 students; others were reported to have almost 70. In 2015 the average class size in Dili was 42 students, while the national average was 31 (Ministry of Education, moe.gov.tl/?q=node/217). Many schools address overcrowding by accommodating two or three shifts of classes per day, subsequently reducing total classroom time for each child. These material constraints, along with teachers' own visions of education, shape how they prioritize curriculum content and implement the reform's pedagogy.

Finally, the communication of the reform's objectives, principles and methodologies has been characterized by 'conceptual vagueness' (Lopes Cardozo, 2012, p. 760). Not only are much of the content and the pedagogical approach unfamiliar for teachers, but the communication of the reform has generally been confused and opaque: the public voice of the Ministry of Education has been splintered by mixed messages from various politicians; delays and undersupply of reform materials to schools was a common complaint among both school and reform actors; and a number of participants described the reform's teacher training, delivered via a cascade model,[2] as using lecture-style methods rather than modelling the learner-centered pedagogy the teachers are now expected to use.

Language

The *Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (2002)* recognizes Portuguese and Tetun as the nation's two official languages and acknowledges the existence of several local languages (article 13), while designating English and Indonesian as 'working languages' (article 159). In the education sector, language has been a contentious issue since independence (Quinn, 2013). Although Tetun is the nation's *lingua franca* and Portuguese is spoken fluently by only a minority of the population (Quinn, 2013, p. 163), Portuguese was the language of the first post-independence primary-school curriculum, in which Tetun was designated an 'auxiliary

[2] In 'cascade' training, each individual who receives training in turn provides the training to several others, often repeated through several layers to reach very large groups; in this case, all teachers nationwide. The model, often used in resource-poor contexts, is popular because it is cheap, but is commonly criticized for distorting and diluting information as it passes through the various levels.

language' (Taylor-Leech, 2008, p. 162). The 2013 Curriculum Reform makes Tetun the primary language of instruction for the first time and introduces a language-progression methodology that slowly introduces Portuguese as a foreign language. This approach is intended to ensure students are proficient in both Tetun and Portuguese by the end of Grade 6, because the secondary school curriculum is in Portuguese. Tetun and Portuguese are both subjects in their own right (that is, Tetun Literacy and Portuguese Literacy), as well as languages of instruction for other subjects. The reform's language policy is premised on the notion that students learn best in a language they understand and on studies showing that teaching in Portuguese has been ineffective in Timor-Leste. For example, a 2010 World Bank study that found that '[m]ore than 70% of students at the end of grade 1 could not read a single word' of a simple passage, with this rate dropping to 40 per cent and 20 per cent in grades 2 and 3, respectively (Amorim, Stevens & Gacougnolle, 2010, p. 2). However, given that '[l]anguage policy debates are always about more than language' (Taylor-Leech, 2008, p. 153), this controversial feature of the Curriculum Reform provides a useful starting point for contrasting the school and reform visions of education.

Language is a key aspect of the school vision's focus on internationalization, which positions Portuguese as a 'window to the world' that will enable students to work and study overseas as members of an international community. This position also stems from the fact that schooling was, for centuries, a foreign system that provided direct access to concrete privileges (Taylor-Leech, 2008, p. 154-7). As such, many school actors accept school as a place where children learn things disconnected from their daily lives (Sarangapani, 2003; see also 'Content').

Almost all school actors were themselves educated in Portuguese or Indonesian and refer to their own experience as evidence of the effectiveness of such a model. A majority of school actors (7 of the 10 with whom I discussed language) expressed concern about the reduction of Portuguese in the new curriculum; nine expressed support for its continuation. Shah (2012) reported that Portuguese as language of instruction was an unpopular choice among teachers at the time of the first post-independence curriculum.

My data, conversely, show strong support for Portuguese in schools, consistent with Quinn (2013, p. 182), despite the fact that most teachers themselves do not speak the language proficiently. The discrepancy may reflect the effect of the 'vacuum of information' about policy goals and concepts, leading teachers 'to continue with the last policy with which they were familiar' (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2016, p. 7). Portuguese is also seen as deeply connected to Timorese history and identity (Taylor-Leech, 2008, p. 157) by many school actors. Several mentioned the use of Portuguese as a code language to evade Indonesian surveillance during the resistance. Interestingly, no school actors referred to Tetun as part of the Timorese identity when asked to explain their language preferences. Another reason for this preference for Portuguese over Tetun in the curriculum is a perception that Tetun is insufficiently developed. Five of ten school actors said Tetun's rightful role is as an auxiliary language to Portuguese, as per the previous curriculum, a similar finding to Taylor-Leech (2008, p. 162).

Conversely, Tetun is at the center of the reform's vision regarding language. Every single interviewed reform actor supported Tetun as the main language of instruction. In contrast to the school actors, Timorese reform staff referred to their own difficulties learning in Portuguese and Indonesian as evidence of the need to teach children in Tetun, and many did view Tetun as part of the Timorese identity, similar to findings in other studies

(Taylor-Leech, 2008, p. 158). The reform vision posits that Tetun is indeed sufficient as a language of instruction, and many reform staff emphasized that Timorese people's *knowledge* of Tetun's written form, rather than the language itself, is insufficiently developed.

The distance between the school and reform visions regarding language is exacerbated by the (mis)communication of the reform. All three school leaders complained of either mixed messages from government officials or the lack of information about the language-progression methodology. These problems are compounded by teachers' limited exposure to the methodology's full scope across all grades due to the reform's staged implementation; the effect of 'cascade' teacher training; and the media's unclear and inconsistent reporting on the topic.[3] The reform team is aware of these miscommunications and has taken steps to address them through clarifications in teacher training, but these are again prone to the dilution of the cascade model.

This miscommunication has contributed to teachers resisting or appropriating the policy to their own vision. One school coordinator explained that teachers feel disheartened that the new language policy seemingly wastes years of time and energy invested in learning Portuguese. This same coordinator advises teachers to use more Portuguese so as not to disadvantage students academically. Other examples of appropriation were abundant in classroom observations. Teachers regularly used Portuguese when teaching other subjects, even Tetun Literacy. Within the time constraints of shifts in overcrowded schools, many teachers enact the school vision of language in their selectivity of the subjects they teach, with Portuguese Literacy consuming proportionately much more class time than allocated in the official timetable (see 'Content' below).

Content

It is important to distinguish between two clear forms of localization of curriculum content. The first is the inclusion of explicitly local content, including Timorese history, geography, music, arts, and permaculture practices, with the objective 'to strengthen our Timorese identity and values,' and 'look at the onus of being proud of your ancestors and your traditional culture and traditional belief systems,' as described by a national and an international reform consultant, respectively. The second form is the contextualization of (abstract or universal) concepts through the use of local materials and examples, with a clear pedagogical function in its focus on experiential learning. For example, market shopping scenarios are used to calculate additions in Mathematics; local fruits are used to construct a model of the solar system in Natural Science; and students conduct research on their families' daily hygiene routines in Health. One international consultant described this type of localization as 'mak[ing] links to the experience of the student' when teaching content that is either 'related to everyone's life here or . . . to the international canon of what people should know'. National reform staff also identified this objective of localization to increase learning effectiveness and information recall.

Localization features prominently in the reform vision of curriculum content, and the majority of interviewed reform staff named localization as a reform objective, providing

[3] Recent newspaper headlines include: It's a 'patriotic duty' to learn Portuguese in Timor-Leste, says the Minister of Education. (2016, 9 June). *Timor Agora*; Ministry of Education maintains old curriculum. (2016, 10 January). *Timor Post*; Students who speak Tetun will be fined 1 dollar' (2016, 13 July). *Timor Post*.

rationale and examples like those above. The same was not true for school staff. When asked what has changed in the new curriculum, many pointed to language and the scripted lesson plans. In many interviews, I pressed further, asking about changes in curriculum content. Not one interviewed teacher mentioned anything relating to local(ized) content.

This is not to say that Timorese nationalism or identity are absent from the school vision. But, similar to its position on language, the school vision considers the *internationalization*—not localization—of content the best way to 'catch up' to the developed world, secure future prosperity, and affirm Timor-Leste's place as a modern, sovereign nation in the international community. This position is not surprising. As described above, schooling in Timor-Leste has always been a foreign system that prioritizes foreign epistemologies, whose abstraction and disconnection from local realities historically conferred concrete social privileges on its students.

Although they did not agree with this position, Timorese reform staff understood this mindset, noting that it was prominent in their own families and educational experiences. One described it thus: 'In reality, parents do a lot of things related to science, but they don't know how to explain them. They say that if you want to learn science, you have to go to school'. Both national and international reform staff explained that some people think learning local culture and language is backward, a position commonly found in international educational research (e.g., Lopes Cardozo, 2012; Sarangapani, 2003, p. 202). One international consultant explained that she considered such a position a misinterpretation of localization. Indeed, she viewed the Timorese education system *prior* to the Curriculum Reform as backward: 'We need to move Timor into . . . the current age. Because it really is . . . what schools were like fifty years ago'. Keeping pace with global changes is an objective of both the reform and school visions of education, but one that is understood differently: while school actors generally do not see the function of localization in service of that goal, reform staff do.

Localization does not, however, erase other obstacles, including gaps in teachers' own knowledge. One commonly mentioned example of the previous curriculum's lack of localization is the use of pizza slices to teach fractions. Several reform staff pointed out that few Timorese children know what pizza is, let alone eat it. Hence, the solution was to swap pizza with familiar foods. I observed one Grade 3 teacher use local fruits to teach simple fractions. However, he did not understand the difference between a fraction and a decimal number ('One-point-two is the same as one-over-two', he said), and he ordered sequentially the equal quarters of a mango (1/1, 1/2, 1/3, 1/4).

Classroom overcrowding and the subsequent multiple shifts resulted in teachers being selective about which content they actually taught. Rather than reduce the time allocated to each lesson proportionately (e.g., from 50 to 30 minutes), teachers generally taught a smaller number of full lessons of their preferred subjects, often Portuguese Literacy. For example, despite constituting 10 per cent of the grades 2 and 3 timetable (averaged), my observations revealed that Portuguese Literacy was taught in over 30 per cent of lessons (6 of 19), while Tetun Literacy was taught slightly more than required in the official timetable (7 of 19). In my observations, Math was taught in line with its allocation, Natural Science and Social Science were all taught less than required, and Art and Culture, Physical Education, and Health were not taught at all.

Pedagogy

The school and reform positions on localization and internationalization are reversed in regard to pedagogy. While reform actors embed 'international' pedagogical models in the curriculum, school actors appropriate these through a largely 'local' pedagogy that aligns with local social structures. These appropriations of the reform's pedagogy echo similar findings of prior research in Timor-Leste (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2016; Shah & Quinn, 2014), suggesting that many of the same contextual factors remain, in spite of the reform's focus on localization and intention to address problems of previous curricula.

The school vision of pedagogy reflects local or 'traditional' pedagogy (as many actors described it), centered around rote learning, infused with religion, and maintained through the teacher's authority and control. This control commonly involves corporal punishment, and I saw several instances of ear-twisting and light slaps in classroom observations. One school coordinator saw corporal punishment as unfortunate but inevitable due to its cultural (and colonial) prevalence and parental support, despite his knowledge that the Curriculum Reform—and international law—prohibits it. Despite being a public school, religion was prominent: all classes at my focal school began and ended with a prayer; every classroom had a religious image on the wall; and teachers talked about religion's ethical, pedagogical purpose in schooling. The moral role of teachers in helping to shape children into citizens is also part of the school vision of pedagogy. A common phrase is that education 'makes people into people' (*forma ema sai ema* in Tetun), perhaps also reflecting a colonial-era, missionary-style view of school's role in shaping moral, civilized citizens (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2016, p. 10). Several teachers identified this role and its concomitant social prestige as part of their professional identity and their love of teaching.

The reform vision of pedagogy, conversely, focuses on engendering a love of learning in students, which is central to the reform's most salient pedagogical feature: learner-centered pedagogy (LCP). An international consultant loosely described LCP as a way to ensure students are 'involved [in] and a part of their own learning; it's not just remembering something, it's applying it as well. It's also helping with life skills, being confident, you know, having faith in yourself, interacting with people—all of that stuff'. Two Timorese consultants explained that the reform aimed to 'change the mentality' around various social issues. The reform vision is explicitly anti-violence and secular (although many of the Timorese reform staff are devout Catholics). Perspectives on religion among the international reform staff ranged from complete contempt of religion in schooling as an intolerant, undemocratic relic that encouraged blind obedience, to a more pragmatic acceptance of its disciplining role to 'keep things kind of tight' in the transition to unfamiliar pedagogical territory in a post-conflict, post-colonial context.

Many international reform consultants referred to international research on the effectiveness of LCP to argue for its adoption in the Timorese curriculum, and they placed pedagogies on an evolutionary timeline rather than in different cultural spaces. One international reform consultant said that rote-learning might be appropriate in some (particularly Asian) cultures, but was not a 'natural' way for children to learn, unlike LCP. Another described international best practices as 'an evolving science' and LCP as 'progressive pedagogy', while labelling the common pedagogy in Timor-Leste as 'old-style rote learning'. Yet, as other scholars have pointed out (e.g., Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012), LCP does not come from a universal, timeless vacuum. It is a culturally, historically and materially specific package of practices that interacts with local

conditions when transplanted to and appropriated in new contexts. Therefore, what is best practice in one context may not transfer easily to another.

While many school actors identified LCP as a feature of the new curriculum, their understandings of it revealed 'conceptual vagueness' (Lopes Cardozo, 2012), partly due to their unfamiliarity with the concept but also because of how it was communicated to teachers. Various teacher perceptions—for example, that students being active in class reduces teachers' workload, and that LCP substitutes 'real learning' for 'play'—were provided as reasons to either support or reject LCP, respectively. Many teachers recognized that LCP aims to increase student involvement, but rather than replace teachers as the font of authoritative knowledge, it altered their mechanisms for sharing that knowledge. For example, call-and-response and yes/no questions were common in my classroom observations, while invitations for students to provide considered responses or engage in group discussions were rare.

Contextual factors also affect the implementation of the reform's pedagogy. Overcrowding was a key reason that several school actors disagreed with, or outright rejected, the LCP-inspired change from seating students in rows to groups. Several teachers complained that group seating encouraged students to talk to each other rather than listen to the teacher, and that overcrowding meant that some students inevitably sat with their backs to the teacher—hence challenging the teacher's control and authority. The three schools I visited used varying approaches: one used only row seating, one used only group seating, and the other had classrooms in both configurations.

Certain communication practices were also problematic for the transmission of the reform's vision of pedagogy. Several reform staff acknowledged that the quality, model and frequency of teacher training does not sufficiently explain the reform's pedagogical approach to teachers (Lewin & Stuart, 2003, in Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012, p. 641). In addition to concerns about the aptness of scripted lesson plans in a predominantly oral culture (discussed above), some reform actors worried that the prescriptive plans would hinder teachers' creativity. But ultimately, they considered them a necessary compromise given the minimal pedagogical training teachers have previously received and their unfamiliarity with the new approach. School actors, however, did not share this concern, despite the fact that many of them did not closely follow the lesson plans. Many were in favor of the scripted guides, because they perceived them as reducing their workload by removing the previous curriculum's requirement to write their own lesson plans. These examples highlight the different perspectives between the school and reform visions. Reform staff place more value on creativity and independent thinking, and hence reluctantly produce resources that may limit these qualities in teachers or students. On the other hand, school actors' preference for a more authoritative pedagogical style can accommodate materials providing strict instruction, albeit in methods that do not reflect their own vision.

Despite their differences in visions of education and professional context, both school and the reform actors articulated concerns about the viability of the reform's pedagogical approach. Emphasizing the feeling shared by many school actors that material needs are more urgent than pedagogical changes, one school coordinator said, 'I think it's better we talk about quantity first, which doesn't mean we should forget quality. . . But quality,' he cringed, 'not yet'. An international reform consultant mused on the feasibility of the reform's pedagogical approach, largely foreign to the social environment of its implementation:

> The ideals of the [new] curriculum are so far removed from the reality on-the-ground in the classroom currently that there's absolutely no way that those ideals are going to be met in the short term . . . It is a shift not only in teaching but also in the way you view the world, and how do you change that? Can you change that? And do you want to change that?

CONCLUSION

As I sat drinking coffee with one of the teachers on secondment to the reform team, I asked her how she thought the implementation of the Curriculum Reform was going. '*Mana* [sister],' she said, 'the seeds of the reform have only just been planted. It will take time for us to see whether they grow'. All of my research participants agreed on the educational goals of improving quality and contributing to national development. However, reform and school actors place different emphases on the role of internationalization and localization in the Curriculum Reform, and they filter the reform policy through their different visions of education and diverse contexts. Consequently, at this early stage of implementation, their appropriations of the Curriculum Reform are greatly inconsistent. Ethnographic explorations of how education policy travels down the chain into teaching practice can complement policy processes and practitioner experience by broadening understandings of the ideological, material, political, and communicative contexts into which educational policy is introduced.

This research provides just one window into the complex national picture of education in Timor-Leste, and its limitations point to valuable areas for future research, including the reform's changing reception and implementation over time and in diverse parts of the country. What is clear is that bridging gaps between divergent visions of education and cultivating a multifaceted conception of context present significant challenges for the Curriculum Reform. As its implementation progresses and new initiatives[4] contribute to its rollout, time will tell whether the reform's seeds take root and flourish.

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'We were the real teacher'*:* Outcomes of an international practicum in the Solomon Islands for Australian preservice teachers

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International teaching experiences are touted as an opportunity for preservice teachers (PSTs) to grow both personally and professionally, including increased cultural awareness, self-efficacy, independence, and enhanced key teaching attributes. The study reported in this paper explores the outcomes of a four-week international practicum in the Solomon Islands for Australian undergraduate primary PSTs. Survey responses of 27 PSTs who undertook placement in 2014, 2015 or 2016, in either an urban K-12 Catholic school or a rural K-6 primary school in the Solomon Islands are reported. Findings indicate that participants experienced substantial development in teacher identity, classroom confidence, cultural understanding, and in their strategies for supporting students who speak English as an additional language. PSTs also reported that their worldview was impacted as a result of their exposure to this Global South Country. The minimal resources, limited access to education, and general lack of privilege in the Solomon Islands contrasted to their Australian context. The implications of these findings, in regard to the responsiveness of teacher education in engaging PSTs in this more global-focused education, are also considered.

Keywords: International practicum; International field experience; teacher education; Solomon Islands; small state; cross-cultural competency; global education

INTRODUCTION

In a period of increasing criticism about the quality of teacher education, universities globally are seeking ways to innovate teacher education programs and demonstrate the quality of their graduates. One area of innovation that is only marginally explored as a strategy for improving the quality of teacher education is the use of international practicum experiences in the Global South World (also referred to as 'developing' countries). As a strategy that is also likely to have significant benefits for the host country, it is appropriate to investigate the potential of such an approach to enhancing outcomes of teacher education. This paper explores one such approach, and reports specifically on the outcomes for the preservice teachers (PSTs) involved.

Cushner and Mahon (2002) argue that globalization demands internationally literate teachers and that 'immersion experiences in cultures other than one's own' (p. 44) are

essential. Providing opportunities for PSTs to 'go global', with the correct support, can have profound transformative personal and professional positive impacts (Dunn, Dotson, Cross, Kesner, & Lundahl, 2014). In particular, positive impacts can include increased cultural awareness and understanding of diversity; improved self-efficacy; and development of key teaching characteristics (Kabilan, 2013; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001). Further, programs through which PSTs undertake practicum in contexts socio-culturally different to their own have been identified as opportunities to confront their ethnocentric world views and construct understanding of the ways in which culture (and context) influence teaching and learning (Marx & Moss, 2011). This allows PSTs to develop a nuanced understanding of the influence of culture on learning (Dunn et al., 2014) as well as gain the shifts in awareness and attitude about how the western way of life impacts people of the Global South World; a significant area to address in working towards a more equitable and sustainable world.

Malewski and Phillion (2009) discuss the implications of gains arising from cross-cultural international teaching experiences. They suggest that cultural learning leads to increased openness towards students who are female, bi- or multi-lingual, or whose cultural background differs from the majority. They further report that PSTs feel more capable of differentiating between cultural attributes and learning disabilities, better understand what it feels like to be an outsider, and are more willing to differentiate teaching to meet diverse learning needs. Other studies confirm that enhanced cultural competence, greater appreciation and respect for difference, and reduced likelihood of prejudice based on cultural background, are key outcomes of international cross-cultural placement experiences (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001). In the Australian context, where one in four Australians is born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012), and culture, race, and religious affiliations are rapidly diversifying, graduate teachers are expected to be 'responsive to the needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds' (AITSL, 2014). Hence, cross-cultural capabilities that are enhanced through international practicums are critical for successful and quality teaching.

Another benefit of international teaching placements is their reported link to increased confidence, improved self-efficacy, and meaningful professional development (Kabilan, 2013; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001). Pence and Macgillivray (2008) report that PSTs learnt how to handle difficult situations and had more confidence in their abilities to manage their own classrooms following their international teaching experience. Kabilan (2013) discusses that these increases in confidence and competence arise from the necessity PSTs face to apply skills, devise solutions, make decisions, and deal with problems that engage energy, creativity, and inventiveness when in these settings.

Cushner and Mahon (2002) suggest that international teaching experience and subsequent cultural (and broader) learning enable PSTs to form a view of education and classrooms that transcend beyond the normal student teaching experience. They say:

> It is essential, especially in these interdependent, global times, that preservice teachers experience cross-cultural learning to gain a deeper understanding of the world in which they live and to enable them to teach with, work with, and continue to learn from people different to themselves. (p. 55)

While these considerations make university agendas for international teaching experience understandable, partnerships for international placements also serve local, in-country

agendas. This notion is considered further in the next section, which looks at the context of the Solomon Islands, where the international placement reported in this paper took place.

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS CONTEXT

The Solomon Islands is an archipelago consisting of almost 1000 islands (SINSO, 2009), with a population of approximately 642,000 (SINSO, 2015). The archipelago is in the bottom 25 per cent of the poorest countries in the world (United Nations, 2015) and, due to its population, is classified as a small state (Brock & Crossley, 2013). As with many small states, the Solomon Islands span a large geographic area and face many challenges in delivering school and teacher education. Ensuring universal access to quality education is one of the key objectives of The National Development Strategy (NDS) for 2011-2020 (DIMF-AP, 2014), yet progress has been slow and reported as insufficient in the Solomon Islands (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2015).

In the Solomon Islands, only 64.4 per cent of the primary school teachers have completed some form of teacher education and, in the majority of cases, this is limited to a one-year certificate (MEHRD, 2014). In comparison, in Australia, teacher training consists of a minimum four year Bachelor degree or an undergraduate degree and a two-year Masters level qualification. One way our Solomon Islands partners attempt to deal with their relative disadvantage is through the hosting of international PSTs. Engaging Australian PSTs in their schools is viewed as an opportunity to access resources and interact with the PSTs who bring a rich wealth of experience based on their education and teacher education experiences in Australia.

The establishment of international partnerships such as the one we report here provides an opportunity for countries in circumstances similar to those of the Solomon Islands to address their own distinctive needs and educational priorities. Considering the positive outcomes reported to date, in what is, so far, only a small number of studies in this field of research, it is important to extend the investigation of international experiences to examine the different forms it may take and the respective outcomes obtained. While these outcomes are important to consider from both the Australian PSTs' perspective and that of the in-service Solomon Islander teachers, this particular paper is focused on the former. Ongoing research that investigates the outcomes specific to in-service teacher participants will be reported in future papers. These findings are important given that the Solomon Islands is a region of the world that has not previously featured in the international practicum literature as a placement location.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative, single-case study methodology was adopted for this study. Qualitative research is concerned with personal experiences and involves data about 'what people do and say' (Habib, Pathik, & Maryam, 2014, p. 9). As such, qualitative research aligns with the aims of this study, which sought PST's perspectives about their Solomon Island's international placement and how these fit with the aims of the program to influence PSTs' personal and professional attributes. As Habib et al. (2014) report, qualitative research generally utilizes small samples, has broad, open questioning, is descriptive in its purpose and subjective in its interpretation. These attributes also align with the parameters around the present study.

An increasingly common form of qualitative research is that of case-study methodology (Yin, 2014). Case study research is:

> …an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. (Yin, 2014, p. 16)

Yin's definition is particularly fitting in describing the situation in which this study occurred. The Solomon Islands context and the phenomenon of experiencing an international practicum placement in the Solomon Islands inextricably linked the context and phenomenon being studied. This link made the boundaries between context and phenomenon difficult, if not impossible, to define. Moreover, case study often involves multiple sources of data, often collected regularly over a period of time (Yin, 2014). As noted earlier, this was also the case for the present study, which involved data collection at the end of each year's program between 2014 and 2016.

Context and background

The Solomon Islands International Practicum is a five-week program that has been running through the National School of Education of Australian Catholic University since 2009 with numbers increasing from six PSTs in 2009 to 20 PSTs in 2016. The program involves the immersion of PSTs in the local school and broader community including an experience of daily life and culture. The five-week program includes four weeks of teaching placement in either an urban Catholic K-12 school, or a rural government primary school (K-6) with PSTs assuming almost full classroom control from day one. The PSTs are allocated classes based on their grade preferences and prior experience, and they work with their PST peers and local Solomon Islander in-service teachers (Associate Teachers) to plan for teaching. The PSTs are given a great deal of independence and autonomy, with the local teachers providing contextual expertise associated with cultural norms, language, and support in understanding students' individual needs.

Beyond the classroom, the practicum incorporates visits to a range of landmarks and island villages. PSTs live in accommodation of a standard commensurate with that of the local teachers with whom they work. This immersion in the life and culture of both the school and broader community contributes significantly to the PSTs' understanding of the lives of the Solomon Islands peoples and plays a significant role in affecting their worldview.

To enter the program, PSTs undertake a competitive application and selection process. Once selected, they participate in induction sessions that cover cultural expectations (e.g. culturally appropriate clothing, behaviour, gender roles, etc.), professional and personal expectations, resources and planning, first aid, and other matters. These sessions help to ensure preparedness and reduce the potential risk of culture shock.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from PSTs post-placement through an online open-ended survey. Questions focused on expectations, learning about the school, children, school staff, culture, curriculum, challenges encountered, and personal and professional growth. A section for additional comments unbounded by specific questions was also included.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Patterns and themes were identified and coded, then re-examined and coding refined. In a way similar to that described by Patton

(2002), codes were used to elicit recurring and emerging themes. Also similar to other research (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001), data were reported under the identified themes.

Participants

Participants were third-year undergraduate primary PSTs from Australian Catholic University. A total of 44 PSTs participated in the program across a three-year period (2014 n=10; 2015 n=14; 2016 n=20). Participants were provided with an information statement and had opportunities to ask questions. An online consent form and questionnaire were distributed via email. All data collection occurred post-practicum and only the project officer had access to consent forms. This helped to protect participant identity and to remove potential conflict of interest, given the researchers were also the accompanying lecturers in the program. Twenty-seven (61%) PSTs consented to participate in the study: 2014 n=5 (50%); 2015 n=11 (79%); 2016 n=11 (55%).

Author's positionality and ethics

Both researchers were involved in the program as the recruiting and the in-country supervising staff for the full duration of time in the Solomon Islands. As Australian women with several consecutive years of experience with this and other engagements with the Solomon Islands (experience ranging from 3-9 years) we have an inherent understanding of the placement experience, the cultural context, and the school context. However, we were still mindful of our White, academic backgrounds as we worked with and interpreted experiences set within the Indigenous Melanesian culture that is significantly different from our own. The previous years' experience in the Solomon Islands and the close relationships established and maintained over almost a decade has built trust and openness between us and the local school community, which helps to provides a level of confidence in the accuracy of interpretation of the culture and events that occurred, although these may still be limited due to the cultural differences.

Being inherently involved in the program and research creates potential bias. Pence and Macgillivray (2008) explain, being so close to the experience (living with, getting to know, and sharing experiences with the PSTs) comes with its own set of complexities, particularly when aiming to remain unbiased in data analysis. While our experience and proximity to the data is an advantage in understanding and reading it, we were also aware of potential bias that could exist in inferences made. To minimize this risk, we examined the data separately before discussing the findings together (inter-rater reliability) and collected and examined three years of data separately before deciding it could be collapsed and treated as a single data set. Research ethics approval was obtained from the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project V2011_130).

RESULTS

The results are outlined according to five key themes that emerged through data analysis. These themes are: 1) Development of teacher identity (PST autonomy and confidence); 2) Cultural competence; 3) In-service teacher learning; 4) Overcoming challenges; and 5) Influence on global worldview. Responses within each theme, including those in which challenges were identified, demonstrated that the outcomes of the program were ubiquitously positive. This positivity was expressed through responses characterised by: 'I have grown a great deal' (PST 1, 2016); 'This has shaped me as a person' (PST 2,

2016); and 'I learnt that I am incredibly fortunate in my life' (PST 1, 2014). Other responses commensurate with these were pervasive and showed the general positive influence of the experience on PSTs' personal and professional life. The specific thematic areas identified in the data analysis are reported in greater detail below.

Development of teacher identity (PST autonomy and confidence)

'This has shaped the future teacher that I will be and want to be' (PST 3, 2015). This comment epitomizes the feelings of many of the PSTs in the study regarding the establishment of their teacher identities derived from their placement.

The placement provided an opportunity for full-classroom control, which contrasted to participants' prior placement experiences in Australian schools. Hence, PSTs needed to make decisions, plan, and respond to all situations as they arose throughout the school day. This autonomy meant that the PSTs learnt about what was 'right' for them as a person and as a teacher. In reflecting on the experience, PSTs explained how 'the autonomy made me a better teacher' (PST 1, 2014) and that 'it was tough at times, but I'm proud of how I taught' (PST 5, 2015). An elaborated comment encapsulates how this autonomy, and the resultant responsibility impacted on them and their teacher identity:

> In Aus, you know you are teaching, but it's artificial in that the kids and parents know that you are not their 'real teacher' and that you are just there for a little bit of time before the real teacher takes over. During this round, I was shocked that my Associate Teacher just handed over the class and said that I could do whatever I liked. We were entrusted with the whole program while we were there. We were the 'real teacher'. The children treated us like it, and as a result we had to step up even more than we would have done on an Australian placement. (PST 11, 2015)

The decision making, adaptability, thinking on the spot and overall control meant that PSTs had to 'back themselves' in what they were doing. One explained: 'I learnt that I was able to cope with more than I ever thought I would be able' (PST 6, 2016). This type of experience of coping and managing in such difficult circumstances – both physically and emotionally – helped them to develop confidence in their teaching and a belief in their own capabilities.

Across all three years, PST cohorts expressed that the practicum reaffirmed their desire to be a teacher, and/or their desire to teach in contrasting cultural settings similar to what they experienced in the Solomon Islands. This desire was represented by comments such as: '[The experience] made me love teaching so much more' (PST 5, 2015); and '[It] reinforced my desire and passion to become a primary school teacher (PST 11, 2016).

Cultural competence

Increased cultural knowledge also emerged as one of the main outcomes of the placement for the PSTs. This included advanced knowledge of cultural differences, and cultural nuances that manifest in the students' behaviour. Many also commented on the extent to which they learnt culture influences and shapes learning, including cultural influences on general behaviours, for example: 'It was very hard to get answers and suggestions out of them [students] while trying to have class discussions and interactive learning' (PST 10, 2015). This comment undoubtedly arose from the experience of Solomon Island children who, culturally, tend to be very shy, do not like individual attention on themselves, and are highly sensitive to non-verbal communication is prevalent (e.g., raising eyebrows to indicate approval and/or agreement).

The relationship between the experience and developing cultural competence was further reflected in the comments participants made about their enhanced ability to teach children for whom English was an additional rather than a native language. Solomon Islands have around 200 different languages. Children typically speak a number of languages including: their native language (mother tongue) – sometimes that of both their maternal and paternal ancestors; Pijin, the local lingua franca; and then English as a third, fourth or even later-acquired language. The opportunity to work with children in these circumstances was seen as a significant benefit because, through necessity, PSTs learnt to extend their communication skills and adapt their teaching to suit the students' language needs. One PST explained:

> This was my first true experience at teaching EAL/D students and I have a stronger respect for EAL/D teachers, as the students in my class were very shy and lacked confidence to practice their English skills . . . [this] presented me with a rich chance to engage in previously unfamiliar experiences. (PST 11, 2016)

There were also reports of PST's learning to read body language and come to recognise the power of non-verbal forms of communication. They learnt to observe and interpret the behaviours and interactions of different people, and how these related to the cultural and social mores that exist in the Solomon Islands. One PST captured this in her comment:

> Working with children and teachers with a completely different culture and language has impacted greatly on my communication skills and has made me better at understanding and analysing body language. (PST 3, 2016)

While cultural knowledge does not have to be developed through an international experience like this, participants indicated that the extent of their learning was enriched through cultural immersion. For example:

> I've always known that every culture is different, however after this experience I was able to really engage myself and interact with a culture completely different from my own. (PST 5, 2014)

The Solomon Islands experience extended PSTs' understanding of social circumstance and poverty, which contributed to the empathy and care PSTs had for their students. For example, PST 10 (2015) suggested the experience was very eye opening [because] Solomon Island's culture is very different to Australian culture and PSTs observed things that would not happen in Australia, like the fact that many children never wore shoes, many came late to class (PST 10, 2015). Another key example of this came from a 2014 participant, a recent graduate and employed teacher. She stated:

> Culture has a huge impact on learning, and how students learn . . . [and] teachers need to be aware of different cultural nuances in order to successfully teach . . . I notice now that I am working as a teacher that I have a lot more of an awareness and understanding than many of my colleagues. (PST 1, 2014)

This helps to show how the learning can transfer beyond the experience and into the profession.

In-service teacher learning

Throughout the placement, PSTs came to understand that teacher training is simple and extremely short in the Solomon Islands (PST 1, 2015) and that, compared to the Solomon Islands, Australia's initial teacher education was markedly different to that afforded to

the local Solomon Islander teachers. PST 8 (2015) described this difference from her perspective:

> Even comparing the teaching between Australia and the school we attended, our teachers are taught about pedagogy and how to teach students to get the best out of them, whereas in the Solomons they are only taught the content. (PST 8, 2015)

Specifically, the difference in initial teacher education experiences meant the Australian PSTs were able to model student-centred pedagogies that Solomon Islander teachers are being called to use in place of the academic and teacher directed pedagogies that have been traditional in the region (PEDF, 2009). This notion was elaborated further by PST 11 (2015), who explained how the Solomon Islands teachers exhibited a level of respect for PST knowledge that was unusual compared to what would be experienced at this stage of the course in Australia:

> The staff . . . (unfortunately) were not given the same opportunities as we were to go to uni to seek a higher education in order to become a teacher. They cared and respected us greatly and that they actually valued OUR teaching knowledge more than their own (which as a 3rd year is a strange – somewhat intimidating – feeling). (PST 11, 2015)

Hence, the majority of the PSTs recognized that the local teachers viewed the presence of the PSTs as an opportunity for professional development, and a chance to work collaboratively to increase their own skills and knowledge. For instance:

> The staff were keen to learn . . . My teacher took notes on my classes so he could implement some of the strategies I was using, they were very interested in sharing ideas and gaining knowledge. As my teacher told me, his class was now 'our' class. All the teachers were very helpful and supportive, providing any assistance required. However they did sit back and let us run their class and lessons. (PST 8, 2015)

The willingness to learn exhibited by the in-service teachers, and the expectation to have your supervising teacher learn from you (PST 1, 2014) was recognised as markedly different from practicum experiences in Australia. This experience fostered a sense amongst PST participants that they needed to 'step up' more than they would on an Australian placement.

Overcoming challenges

Limited resources, large class sizes, homesickness and interactions with fellow PSTs were the most frequently cited challenges. Although, the majority of the participants suggested that hindsight enabled them to view the challenges they experienced as positive because it was through facing and overcoming them that the most learning and growth took place. This was reflected in the comment of one PST who stated that 'the challenges only helped build on me as a person' (PST 4, 2015).

A common challenge highlighted by nearly all PST participants was related to the distinct lack of teaching resources available in Solomon Islands schools, particularly compared to most Australian schools. PSTs suggested that these restrictions increased their creativity and resourcefulness when it came to planning lessons. They also expressed a belief that this creativity and resourcefulness would benefit them in other contexts. For example:

> This experience really shaped me as a teacher as I learnt about the importance of creating ideas with limited resources as you never know what situation or classroom you are going to be placed in. (PST 5, 2014)

> Trying to find ways of conducting engaging lessons using minimal resources. Many activities had to be done using basic pen and paper, meaning I had to use a great deal of ingenuity to come up with activities that were enjoyable and relevant to the class. (PST 2, 2014)

Large class sizes were also cited as a significant challenge: 'teaching 40 plus students was exhausting and draining and I began to lose my voice' (PST 1, 2015). This sentiment was echoed by all the PSTs who taught in the lower years in particular, where language barriers were more prominent amongst younger students and the large class sizes exacerbated this issue.

Experiencing a feeling of homesickness and the extended period of time spent living with fellow PSTs were also cited as challenges for about half of the respondents. Students were constantly together over the five weeks of the program, and this tended to 'inflame social and/or professional tensions because there was no real release' (PST 1, 2014). Some respondents indicated they were able to work through the bumps along the way. Others expressed that, while some challenges were difficult to deal with at the time, upon reflection they could see that these experiences would assist them in the future.

Influence on global worldview

An effect on worldview became evident during the program as PSTs began to identify and describe the Australian way of life as being materialistic and individualistic. Many of the comments from PSTs indicated an appreciation of the social connectedness they witnessed and recognized as key to Solomon Island's culture and lifestyle. PST 8 (2015) encapsulated this:

> I learnt that to be happy you don't need materialistic things, you need friends and family. You need to be a part of a community and support network. This . . . showed me how thankful and giving people can be. (PST 8, 2015)

Understanding how access to education was viewed as a privilege and an opportunity in the Solomon Islands also became apparent. For example:

> It was a place where everyone felt really lucky to be. The students were incredibly grateful for their education and the opportunities that it presented. (PST 1, 2014)

> I learnt that education is the key to success in life. Every child turned up to school and they knew it was a privilege to be there and they all wanted to be something. (PST 4, 2014)

This insight into the way in which education was viewed as a privilege in the Solomon Islands led the PSTs to recognise and to feel grateful for the opportunities they have in Australia. 'I feel like I have a new appreciation for life and for the things I take for granted' (PST 2, 2016) is just one comment highlighting the sentiments expressed by many.

Participants expressed a need to be more appreciative. They identified that they have too many 'things'; and they conveyed an increased understanding of what is important and what is irrelevant in life. Several communicated that the experience made them sense things they took for granted in Australia 'may never be possible in the Solomon Islands'

(PST 4, 2016). One PST really captured the essence of the comments representing such a stance:

> I think this experience really allowed me to appreciate the life I, and most Australians, live. It made me really acknowledge how great our education system really is, and made me want to fight for change in countries such as the Solomon Islands, which has a drastically lower social status than us. My personal growth was substantial. I was able to grow not only as a teacher but as a person in general. I was able to recognise and acknowledge how many people around the world do live, and it made me realise how lucky I really am, and how my life, especially education, should not be taken for granted. (PST 10, 2016)

Possibly one of the most poignant realisations of the participants, centred around acknowledging the concept of White privilege, something that had been invisible to many of them prior to their Solomon Islands experience. Through reflection on their personal experience they were able to realize 'the impact that skin colour has in the way you are treated within the world' (PST 6, 2015).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support previous research (e.g., Kaliban, 2013; Parr, 2012; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008) that show the generally positive outcomes of international practicum experiences for PST participants. Positive outcomes are evidenced for both PST personal and professional growth, particularly in regard to their cultural awareness, self-efficacy, and teaching capabilities. In this way, the study reported here helps to support evidence and literature that promotes international practicum for the particular success it has in influencing these aspects of PSTs' personal and professional identities.

As with some other studies about international practicum, particularly when the host country has a significantly different culture (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Malewski & Phillion, 2009), we evidenced that the Solomon Islands teaching immersion helped to strengthen PSTs' understanding and awareness of the importance of culture for successful teaching and learning. One example of the longitudinal benefits of this was seen in the graduate teacher participant who reported having an increased sense of the importance of culture that she was readily able to accommodate in her planning. What was most poignant about her contribution here was her observation that she seemed more readily able to cater for this sort of diversity than her (established) teacher colleagues.

PSTs also reported growth in communication skills, particularly in their ability to 'read' and sense the needs and moods of children in the learning environment. This arose from their experience of teaching in large classrooms with children from a predominantly non-verbal culture in which body language and facial movements were key forms of communication. Exposed to increased forms of non-verbal communication, exacerbated by low English language levels, PSTs could not rely on spoken language to the extent they were used to. They had to learn to read their children's needs through the individual and group behaviours exhibited. This unique form of learning made them more sensitive and more receptive to a wider range of communication styles.

Another finding from our study that again aligns with some others (e.g., Kaliban, 2013), relates to PSTs' increased confidence and identity formation as a teacher. We were the 'real' teachers said one PST, conveying their sense that this is not nearly as strongly developed in the practicum setting of Australian schools. General concerns about

practicum have identified an issue around the way in which PSTs feel obliged to adopt the style of their supervising classroom teacher rather than establish their own teaching identity (Maynard, 2001). In our program, the Solomon Islander teachers saw the PSTs as teachers, and their behaviour towards them reflected this.

Identity is as much about developing a belief of who we are, as it is a belief about how others see us (Danielewicz, 2014). As such, it is easy to see how the experience of being treated as a 'real' teacher, helped to accelerate our PSTs' ability to see themselves as teachers. While the notion of identity and identity formation are dynamic, complex and ill-defined (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), there is universal agreement that the formation of a teacher identity is important if teachers are to be successful, agentic, and professional (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005), and it appears that this particular international practicum provided the circumstances that fostered such an outcome.

The influence of undertaking international practicum in the Global South on these PSTs is something reasonably unique that this study offers. These circumstances appeared to influence the worldview of PST participants, who all conveyed some sort of changed perspective of the life they lead. Many comments centred on taking 'basic' things, like education and access to fresh water, for granted. Some noted that they had never really seen these things as privileges before. A number also reported feeling a sense of materialism, consumerism and individualism as negative attributes of the Australian lifestyle. They noted that, even though they lived with pervasive poverty and lack of opportunity, Solomon Islands people were generally happier and more connected to one another than what they witnessed and experienced in the Australian culture. This was transformational for PSTs and how they viewed their own and others' lives.

Anecdotally, and in conjunction with the reported observations of our PSTs, in-service Solomon Island teachers see the partnership we have established as an opportunity to access valuable professional learning. As noted earlier, Solomon Islands, like many small states, experience significant disadvantage in the provision of equitable access to education across the archipelego and teachers face challenges in access to pre- and in-service teacher education opportunities when compared to Global North World countries. In-country experience,s such as the one reported here, play a role in supporting local agendas to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

So what are the implications for ongoing research and for teacher education? We see this study as supporting others in advocating for cross-cultural professional practicum experiences within teacher education courses. From what we have learned from almost a decade of running this program in the Solomon Islands, coupled with what we have read about international practicum, we are confident that the learning potential is particularly strong when international placements occur in Global South World contexts. The Global South World context (particularly given we were from a Global North context) was highly influential in the level of learning about culture, planning, and teaching for diversity, and for the fostering of teacher identity. Moreover, we believe that there is significant potential for Global South World teaching experiences to influence the worldviews of PSTs, which we hope will transcend PSTs' ongoing lives and subsequently influence what and how they teach once they enter the profession. This has enormous potential to shift the individualistic and short-sighted understandings and actions of many in Global

North World contexts; actions that lead to many local and global issues such as sense of community and the existence and impact of privilege and poverty. We see this aspect, as well as the professional learning potential for in-country teachers of small states, where teacher education is in its relative infancy, as key areas for future research. This research is currently underway to elicit the extent of the value and impact of this partnership for Solomon Islander teachers and students.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the difficulty we have had in condensing the wealth of information our PSTs have shared with us through this study, and attest that this paper follows what one of our PST participants communicated: 'This . . . provides but a needle head's view of what was a mountainous experience' (PST 2, 2014).

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Comparative and international learning from Vanuatu research moratoria: A plurilevel, plurilocal researcher's auto-ethnography

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In this article, I offer a reflexive auto-ethnography to revisit questions about knowledge and research practices in international contexts, influenced differently by aspects of globalization. Specifically, I position my experience of the Vanuatu research moratorium on 'foreign' researchers of 2013/2014 as a lynchpin to analyse and contribute to long-standing, recently revived debates about ethics in research, the politics of international comparisons, and their relationships with traditional knowledge. I base analysis primarily on my plurilevel research and experiences in parts of Vanuatu, in Australia and in our shared South Pacific sub-region in global context between 2008 and 2016, and on my plurilocal personal and researcher identity. In these spaces, the salience of postcolonial identities—with those already allocated, perceived, or shared—has long been tied to different actors' research aims, application, conduct, and funding. Lenses of critical globalization and postcolonial theories and critical discourse analysis have informed my research to date and, in undertaking this auto-ethnography, I confront current limits and possibilities in these. One aim is to shed light on how we might extend understanding and enactment of inter-related practices of ownership, production, and uses of knowledge situated within decolonizing discourses and more rapidly changing, integrated education and research contexts. I explore how understanding these dimensions can contribute to strengthening our understandings of and resulting approaches to knowledge production and sharing, which I see as the core work of research, research relationships and, ultimately, education and teaching.

Keywords: research ethics and politics; auto-ethnography; moratorium

INTRODUCTION

A decade ago, as a fledgling doctoral researcher on an Asia Pacific regional Australian government-affiliated grant project—and as a fledgling Australian—I had much to learn when I began comparative and international research in the area of multilevel education and development policies; and, certainly, I still do. I did, however, bring to the inquiries a significant range of 'international' personal and professional experience as well as heritage that defy the singular age-, citizenship-, class-, gender-based, ethnic, and

linguistic reductions (to which they are regularly subjected)[1] for a number of reasons that speak to the key themes I address in this article and my research. These themes include: knowledge ('contemporary' and that identified as 'traditional'), and personal and professional histories of colonization, globalization, migration and identity politics, intersecting most strongly, in my case, with class, citizenship, and gender aspects (Appiah, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991).

The particular combination of my own markers of personal and professional identity frames analysis further within dynamic global circumstances of heightened *plurilevel* and *plurilocal* interdependence (Nederveen-Pieterse, 2015; Waite & Cook, 2011). For both terms, I adopt the prefix of 'pluri-' over 'multi-' to capture a sense of simultaneity of location and identification with place, professional, and personal (Selasi, 2014). I see affinities with Aikman's (2014) writing on language in education where, in making a case for plurilingual education, she observes the need to acknowledge that some people have layered and 'complex repertoires' of language, which I extend to other markers of identity. The following point is useful for capturing the distinction with 'multi-':

> In terms of multilingual societies, [researchers] note how particular languages are linked to particular identities or geographical locations, and particular languages are seen as bounded and distinct from one another. (p. 222)

Plurilevel here refers to activities occurring across subnational, national, regional, and global levels, limited constructions though these may be. *Plurilocal*, similarly, refers to a multiplicity of locations that may be experienced, or valued, differently and still simultaneously.

The steps I take in the article are to first position my plurilocal personal and researcher identity, to provide some contextual detail about Vanuatu, and then to discuss Vanuatu research policy and moratoria on 'foreign' researchers. Following this, I add layers about my plurilevel research and experiences in parts of Vanuatu, in Australia, and in our shared South Pacific sub-region between 2008 and 2016, together with the most recent research moratorium. I offer analysis of the moratorium as a lynchpin in proceeding with subsequent analysis about ethics of research, the politics of international comparisons and their relationships with traditional knowledge, especially in Melanesia and the Pacific islands.

I undertake this reflexive auto-ethnography to revisit questions about knowledge and research practices in international contexts that are differently influenced by aspects of globalization. Some details of the particular combination of identity markers that contribute to my standpoint should be outlined here, not only because I have chosen an auto-ethnographic genre but also because discussions about the ways that *who* we are individually relate to *how* we are as educators and/or researchers are increasingly common amongst colleagues and with students. Understanding researcher identity is important in the ways it can influence the chosen processes and outcomes of research (Harding, 1993, 2008). Making those elements visible is particularly relevant to the method and handling of knowledge and research in this article. In the level of detail that follows, I intend, in part, to anchor the complexity of those abstract concepts of

[1] These reductions relate as much to aspects of educational 'success as failure', escape and erasure (Reay 2006), which I discuss below, as to our subjective comparisons against local and national norms, and/or situated assumptions and experiences.

globalization, migration, and postcoloniality that relate to education. It is my own reckoning of Wright Mills' (1959) 'sociological imagination', which sees connection of our personal lived experiences with shared social phenomena. I also aim to demonstrate my deeply informed personal interest in, and insistence on, plurilevel analysis where such geographically and socially varied individual biographies are, while not new, pertinent and prevalent in our times of increased migration – forced and voluntary (Waite & Cook, 2011).

I have lived for three, five, seven, eight and fourteen years, respectively, in: Japan, the US, UK, Bermuda and Australia, not in that order. During that time, I attended a range of different types of schools in towns, nations, and on different islands, spanning large and small, public-private, sex-disaggregated, and religious and secular institutions. I accumulated an accent that most people cannot locate, and learned three languages, but now only use English. I have worked as an educator in different nations for two decades, in primary and high schools, privately, and in a higher education institution. My mother descends from one of the first seven families to inhabit Reunion Island (epitome of a cosmopolitan melting pot) and is of mixed, predominantly French, descent that traverses Madagasgar, Mauritius and the Seychelles but who, unlike my grandparents, was born and raised, English-speaking, in Kenya, where she lived until pregnant with me. My father is from a town then, and perhaps somewhat still, steeped in nationalistic and patriarchal practices and values in the North of England, of Irish, Scottish and Germanic descent. Both parents were originally working class, and both keenly understood and valued education—as, partly, do I—in the highly ambivalent senses of 'erasure' and 'escape' that Reay (2006) articulates, and as 'success as failure', in its occasional alienations and confusions about 'belonging' (Waite & Cook, 2011). Neither parent went to university.

Where many in our increasingly competitive and populous world see the provision or attainment of particular types of education as offering potential solutions to our most perplexing and ever-emerging questions, to acknowledge these influences in research into education is all the more pertinent. It is worth considering the ways that the content, policies and provision of education are influenced, not only by processes associated with globalisation, but also with how people's experiences of globalization inform those processes. Contemporary work in cosmopolitanism has gone some way towards considering these dimensions (Appiah, 2007).

That comparative and international education (CIE) research is practiced within spaces informed by contemporary and historical political change, and by individuals of varied personal and professional backgrounds, has been widely recognized. Researchers may concurrently work as activists, educators, policy makers, and/or politicians; we could identify ourselves or be identified by different actors or at different times as 'insiders', 'outsiders' or as occupying more complex, less easily defined, or essentialized, spaces (McNess, Arthur, & Crossley 2013).

After opening with a discussion of the approach to auto-ethnography that I take, I look more closely at the contexts for the Vanuatu moratorium on 'foreign' researchers, and my learning of them, and then proceed to situate these within contemporary politics of international comparisons and 'traditional' knowledge in South Pacific and plurilevel education and development contexts.

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

My approach to auto-ethnography here represents two variations of the method. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011, p. 19) identify the first as 'layered accounts' and, in this account, I layer abstract analysis, data, reflection, and relevant literature through lenses of personal and professional experiences, thereby highlighting the 'procedural nature of research' (p. 20). Ellis et al. note the implications of this approach for the purposes of research, identified as a 'source of questions and comparisons' rather than a 'measure of truth' (p. 117) and, after Rambo (2005, p. 583 as cited in Ellis et al. 2011, p. 20), identity is treated here as an 'emergent process'. The approach I take, therefore, also resembles elements of 'reflexive ethnographies', or, 'confessional tales' (Van Mannen, 1988 as cited in Ellis et al., 2011) where the ethnographer's backstage research endeavours become the focus of investigation (Ellis, 2004 as cited in Ellis et al. 2011, p. 20). The aim is to illuminate broader phenomena, in this case plurilocal researcher approaches and identities in shifting plurilevel (where 'levels' may include, for example, policy arenas, spatial, and temporal) contexts (Waite & Cook, 2011).

My prior (since 2007) and current comparative, international research, informs the analysis in this article. In conducting elements of critical discourse analysis (CDA) through different stages, my methodology has consisted of what Street (2009) calls an, 'ethnographic epistemological approach' to interviews and textual analysis that have prioritized cultural and historical contextual dimensions. Through the—also layered—methodological approach of CDA in prior research, I have sought to map and understand the construction of education and development policies by various education and development actors that work at multiple levels of activity and policy in Southeast Asian and the South Pacific contexts. I have specifically focused on the roles of language and power in those processes (Fairclough, 2003; McCormick, 2011, 2012). I investigate discursive processes through which actors and policies—civil society, donor and government employees—in aid-receiving, post-colonial contexts have been involved in the regional and global programs of Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 'post-2015 agenda-setting' processes, and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (McCormick 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016a, 2016b).

Since beginning that work, I have consistently noticed inattention to the place of the researcher and their standpoint in CDA (Harding, 2008). In my earlier doctoral research, I incorporated a 'hermeneutic' dimension (Neumann, 2012), where I self-identified; doing this almost apologetically as a (relatively) young, female educator and researcher of mixed class, ethnic, linguistic and national heritage (McCormick, 2012). Even this description insufficiently captures the particular combination of lenses touched on above. Many people are frequently essentialized still more reductively, both explicitly and implicitly, along these lines; all of which markers of experience and identities could be interpreted as being representative—yet not—from differing vantage points related to person, place and/or time.

It is not my aim, in this article, to canvas the literature on hybrid identities, or bounded and dynamic definitions of culture(s). These debates do underpin my aims of interrogating approaches to knowledge and research, and the particular opportunities that the Vanuatu moratorium offered for reflection on wider dynamics at play, particularly for navigating knowledge production and, especially, in postcolonial contexts (Appiah, 2007; Hall, 1997a, 1997b; Holliday, 2013; Nederveen Pietersen, 2015; Sen, 2006). In the field

of CIE, Tikly and Bond (2013) eloquently synthesize an impressive range of the related literature, as do McNess, et al. (2013).

LEARNING VANUATU, MORATORIA AND NATIONAL RESEARCH POLICIES

As a person currently teaching in an Australian institution and researching in and about plurilevel contexts, including Vanuatu, I have been prompted to (re-)view my approaches within the field of CIE through the lens of the most recent Vanuatu research moratorium in 2013. I undertook layers of contextual analysis related to the geographical, historical, political, and social contexts for education before I could begin to understand education in Vanuatu, the South Pacific, and the global/international development policies that have, in the main, been aimed at realizing formal, academic schooling world-wide (McCormick, 2011, 2012).

By way of a very brief introduction: for Vanuatu, this included understanding the linguistic diversity, with 115-plus local languages and three national languages (Bislama, English, and French) resulting from 'contact', missions, colonization, and trade. Likewise, it is vital to understand Vanuatu's particular status in terms of nationhood and independence: over 80 islands were colonized and unified as the New Hebrides under British-French 'Condominium' in 1906, with independence, as Vanuatu, was won in 1980. The specific needs of small states, especially those of islands, have been documented elsewhere (Crossley & Sprague, 2012), and this article and Special Issue contribute to understanding dimensions of those, especially in terms of negotiating the range of cultural, linguistic, and political practices, and the associated particularities in aspects of education and governance. As in other neighbouring Melanesian islands, land is approximately 90 per cent communally owned and is central to most facets of life. Vanuatu has a population of 258,000 (UNICEF, 2015), and 85 per cent of people live rurally by the traditional economy (Regenvanu, 2010). I continued to deepen and update this and other dimensions of contextual learning as my research proceeded.

As discussions, interviews, literature searches, and observations have deepened since I began my inquiries in 2008, I have learned, although by no means exhaustively, about the importance of *ni-Vanuatu kastom* knowledge, practices and ownership (McCormick, 2011, 2014). These include relationships between people (genders, generations, relations, island groups), language, land, and spirituality, and dynamic 'living culture' and 'intangible culture', which is often oral and tied to organic materials (Abong, 2013 Regenvanu, 1999). There has been increased discursive and institutional attention to the traditional economy, which has recently been promoted by government (Regenvanu 2010), and recognized by the former Australian Agency for International Development, (now part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade). Regional pilot research reported in the 'Alternative Indicators of Well-being in Vanuatu' (Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, 2012) has sought to offer locally identified approaches to 'development', and knowledge. Conducted by the Malvatumauri Chiefs' Council, and followed by subsequent reports nationally and regionally, these reports were supported by the sub-regional Melanesian Spearhead Group. These sketches do not do justice to the range across the islands, but serve here to introduce plurilevel influences on and the nature of knowledge, education, and research in contexts that were relatively new to me, and my ongoing layers of learning within it.

Before looking at the moratorium in detail, it is important to signal a key area of my cumulative learning that has been about the geographically and historically situated, and potentially unequal, nature of rules and systems that govern knowledge and research.

I received Australian institutional ethics approval for my doctoral studies in 2007. However, since the study was conducted within a research grant project with Australian and Vanuatu government approval, I was instructed not to apply for formal permission through the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC). As the most junior and youngest member of the team, I was in a precarious situation both in terms of the stage of my career and position in the institution. In addition, the specific nature of that research, in comparatively considering multilevel policy processes to national rather than sub-national level meant working only in Port Vila, which can be said to represent a very particular slice of life and work across the islands. In being affiliated with a development agency study and, so, government, I was not beholden to the same reporting expectations, which I have come to understand as a potentially problematic exception in relation to research. In addition to this geopolitical aspect, institutional ethics requirements have changed so significantly in the decade since that it would now not be possible for either a student or faculty member to not cite compliance with local policies; identification of local contacts is now an explicit and unambiguous requirement for approval to conduct international research.

My more recent research into 'post-2015 development agenda' processes in the South Pacific (McCormick, 2014, 2016a, 2016b) began before and continued beyond the moratorium, with the approval and participation of the VCC. It was directly affected by it, and has served to prompt the deeper analysis and reflection that are the focus of this article.

Histories of knowledge and research governance in Vanuatu

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC, established in 1957) initiated a collaborative research model in the 1970s, at the core of which were the local networks of fieldworkers (Taylor & Thieburger, 2011). The first women's fieldworker workshop was held in 1993, and a network of fieldworkers founded 1994 (Tryon, 1999). In subsequent years, the network was strengthened (see articles by Bolton, 1999; Regenvanu, 1999; Tryon, 1999 in the *Oceania* special issue dedicated to the topic). During that time, Australian researchers were involved in collaborating with and training fieldworkers in particular research methods (Tryon, 1999; VCC, 1995).

The Vanuatu Cultural Research Policy emerged from its post-independence nine-year moratorium in 1984, which had itself been a response to decolonizing political and social struggles, under the auspices of the Vanuatu National Cultural Council (VNCC). The VNCC was established in 1988 and designated as legally responsible for research [Chapter 186, 6(2)(e)]. The composition of VNCC made provision for one women's representative. Even as recently as 2013, a complaint was registered in a national newspaper that the female representative had not been announced together with the announcement of the male representatives, which again raises questions about power and representation noted earlier in the article and elsewhere (McCormick, 2014). The VCC was designated the 'executing arm' for enacting the policy.

It is significant that the research policy emerged from museum(s) and curators (Witcomb, 2015). Museums are spaces for the construction and representation of identities, including—even especially—at a national level. They are also critical spaces of

knowledge generation, protection and education in its various forms, and here nurtured fieldworker collaborations in knowledge curation, production, protection within histories of genuine collaboration, respect and commitment to ongoing projects of 'knowledge seeking' (Taylor & Thieberger, 2011; Whitcomb, 2015). In a recent volume, combinations of *ni-Vanuatu and* non-*ni-Vanuatu* participants shared critically conscious collegial reflection of their relative positions and limitations, and also of the vast gains in terms of contributions to society and advancement of knowledge within decolonizing discourses that prioritize egalitarian, inclusive values and shared responsibilities for negotiating these (Taylor & Thieberger, 2011).

The national research policy of Vanuatu has been recognized as exemplary by UNESCO, and appears to be the most extensive of formally articulated policies applied to international researchers in a number of South Pacific island nations (all publically available through government websites). The policy requires non-*ni-Vanuatu* researcher application, approval and collaboration where possible with *ni-Vanuatu* fieldworkers. There is a formal research application process, requiring institutional references and a fee. Non-*ni-Vanuatu* researchers are encouraged to learn Bislama and there is a requirement to share products of the research with the VCC depending on the nature of which some may be held in the *tabu* room and communities, with recognition of traditional copyright. Some non-*ni-Vanuatu* researchers with long-standing research relationships were permitted to continue work through the first moratorium (Lissette Bolton, Kirk Huffman (who was the first VCC director from 1977-89) and Daniel Tryon). Other exceptions included those from government-affiliated research. In 2006, a moratorium on commercial filming of the Nagol ceremony in Pentecost was instigated.

Research in Vanuatu

The most recent moratorium, for one year, on foreign researchers working in Vanuatu was announced in July 2013, but ended early in March 2014. Its stated aims were: to rethink and redevelop the 'National Collaborative Research policy and other policies relating to culture and custom'; to 'take stock' of research done in and on Vanuatu, including 'research on land, traditional knowledge and all research that relate to social science, traditional ecological and environmental system and politics'; to identify non-compliance with research policy; and to ensure that researchers' self-interest and exploitation were not being prioritized over *ni-Vanuatu* interests (Abong, 2013). Approved researchers could continue, pending submission of a 10-page summary of current work or face visa cancellation, and deportment (Abong, 2013). Speaking on Radio New Zealand in 2013, the then Director of the VCC, Abong, asserted that, 'In the Pacific and in Vanuatu we live on the cultural and traditional knowledge and it's very important for us' (Abong, 2013). In announcing the end of the Moratorium, Abong stated that the:

> VNCC imposed the moratorium on June 26 2013 covering researches on social science, cultures and land . . . The task has been achieved with a total of 63 reported researches received by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre Director. The stock-take outcome is set to assist VNCC consider its collaborative research policy. Mr Abong acknowledges the cooperation of all researchers and advises that the new research fee is Vt 45,000. (@ Aus$515/ UK pounds 300).

Reflecting on the moratorium

As soon as I learned of it, the 2013/2014 Vanuatu moratorium resonated with many of the themes that had arisen in my prior research, relating to decolonization, individual,

national, and regional (plurilevel) identities tied to education, knowledge, and power relations in turn tied to development, and questions of governance and sovereignty. As a plurilevel researcher who had been working from a historical and postcolonial perspective that values context, I could, to some extent, appreciate the motivations and significance. As a plurilocal person who has sought to consider changes across levels of activity, and who does not have one national or local affiliation, yet has not experienced (neo-)colonial subjugation (although with distant mixed lineage, yet more easily—visibly—identifiable with England, France and Australia, the major colonizers in modern history), or lived in a place of aid dependency, it was more challenging to reconcile that category of 'foreign'. The action of this Moratorium is positioned as representing proactive leadership in knowledge protection (Abong, 2013). There may have been additional internal, for example financial and/or political, factors, that led to the latest moratorium, to which I, as a researcher or foreigner or other unknown reason(s), may not be privy.

I understood that it would be important to consider the moratorium contextually and historically, in relation to prior moratoria on research and specific cultural practices. In order to do that, I undertook inter-textual and thematic analysis of primary documents relating to the moratoria and national research policy, and these were supplemented by my observations over three fieldwork visits to Vanuatu. As I summarize in Table 1, documents included the national research policy, the VCC Director's announcement and text of the Moratorium, and a number of media sources, including releases, responses, and the statement of conclusion of the 2013/2014 Moratorium.

Table 1: Key primary documents related to Vanuatu research and moratoria

Year	Document or statement
1984	Moratorium on International Researchers
1995	Vanuatu Cultural Research Policy
2006	Moratorium on commercial filming of Nagol ceremony
2013	VCC Statement announcing the Moratorium
2013-2014	Moratorium on International Researchers; associated media responses and statements
2014	VCC Statement ending the Moratorium

The human ethics research committee at my Australian institution approved my proposed research in May 2013. In August, after a busy Semester of teaching, I booked a flight for January 2014 to conduct interviews with participants, pending my application to the VCC for approval. When I went to update myself on recent political and social context and happenings in Vanuatu, and on education or development policy work being done, I learned that the Moratorium had been posted on the VCC website in July 2013. It was to run indefinitely, but at least until the following August; given that the prior one had lasted for nine years, it did not bode well (Bolton, 1999).

I decided, since I had work related to our regional CIE society, that I would still go. I could use part of the time on that work, and also develop my emergent Bislama (the Vanuatu version of the South Pacific pidgin English, and a national language), and to continue learning more about other parts of a place with which I had relatively recently, if fairly intensively, become familiar. I chose to go to the Southern island of Tanna, and stayed at the base of Mt Yasur, featured in the globally successful eponymous film last year, and the subject of a documentary in which the Yakel tribe articulate their resistance to 'Westernized' modernity, discursively and in practice. While that visit has become

another personal story, it no doubt has enriched my understandings of aspects of those places at village, island, and national levels. In Tanna, I visited the local museum, which is a VCC branch, and had a conversation about what 'development' is with its former director. I looked at the displays, and planned to return when (or if) research regulations, funding, and time allowed. I felt conscious that such experience would be contributing to my understandings and, surely, indirectly, then, to shaping aspects of my research; these are queries that still occupy not only me (McNess et al., 2013). How blurry are the lines of my personal and researcher 'selves', and what could mean crossing from honouring the letter and spirit of the moratorium or, in what may have been a moment of over-dramatized concern, being deported as per its rules and those of the policy? I later went back to conduct the research, with the permission of the VCC.

PLURILEVEL IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH ETHICS AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

During the course of my research, I have learned that Vanuatu receives substantial international aid to education as an aid dependent, decolonizing nation, and that external agencies have had a (dis-)proportionately significant influence on both education and research into education and national development in Vanuatu (Regenvanu, 1999, 2010). The nature and substance of education are intimately tied to knowledge and its production through research and, subsequently, through its legitimation and reproduction. These processes take place within a combination of informal community-based processes and in institutions of education, including schools and museums (Whitcomb, 2015). National government, and a range of internal and external agencies have created and shaped curricula and policies prior to and since independence; although, in recent years, changes in the nature of development relationships are increasingly apparent. Particular approaches to and types of education and development are legitimated and propagated intertextually in international and national development documentation, interaction, and reporting (McCormick, 2012, 2016a).

I extended my initial literature reviews to consider recent work on research ethics and 'traditional' knowledge, and consulted five additional South Pacific nations' requirements for non-citizen researchers, and included these only in a contextual layer of CDA analysis (Blommaert, 2009; McCormick 2016a; 2016b), although there is potential for them to be more systematically and comparatively analysed in future. Such nationally applied approaches are embedded within plurilevel debates and frameworks surrounding the increasing body of regional inquiry into ethical research practices by networks and scholars in the Pacific (Du Plessis & Fairborn-Dunlop, 2009; Fairborn-Dunlop, 2007; Sanga 2013; Smith, 1999), and globally by researchers and multilateral institutions including UNESCO (2007). As Tikly and Bond (2013) identify, UN approaches tend to sit within human rights and research governance approaches, while research and activist approaches have a significantly contrasting, often explicitly decolonizing, approach to the ethically complex aspects of the relationship between research and traditional knowledge. The importance of ethical and political concerns in conducting research internationally––or, more precisely, in contexts in which we may not be considered to belong—endures. So, too, do these sometimes conflicting positions on how we create, interpret, and share knowledge. These concerns inform recent revivals in the field of comparative and international education (CIE) in which essentialist 'insider-outsider' binaries have been contested to make way for more contingent and complex cultural and identity positioning(s) (McNess, Arthur, & Crossley, 2013).

There is enduring importance in interrogating the significance of the nation as the unit of analysis in relation to Vanuatu and most South Pacific postcolonial contexts, especially in light of regional and increasing plurilevel emphases in governance and policy processes. As some researchers move away from or contest the state as the predominant unit of analysis, the project of building or claiming allegiance to, and services from, a nation-state may still be a component of decolonizing projects (McNess et al., 2013; Mohanty, 2009; Tuhiwai-Smith 1999); this is especially salient where a large amount of, although not all, development assistance is conceived and transferred between national units. This question of unit of analysis or level of activity resonates with contemporary change in aid and development dynamics, including in terms of: who donors are—traditional or 'new', 'South-South' exchanges, and peer arrangements, including with Papua New Guinea regionally; and in what represents aid, for example, the role of China. These changing geo-politics for aid and the 'partners' involved have significant implications for research collaborations. Amidst this is the increasing acknowledgement and protection of traditional indigenous knowledge that will be discussed in more detail below.

Regionally significant changes with implications for knowledge and research in the past decade have included the emergence of national education advocacy coalitions tied to Asia South Pacific Association for Adult and Basic Education (ASPBAE), Vanuatu Education Policy Advocacy Coalition (VEPAC), Coalition on Education Solomon Islands and the PNG Education Action Network in Papua New Guinea and the peer information sharing, learning and collaboration involved in these (McCormick, 2014). Pacific education plans and the Pacific Framework for regionalism are other examples. In terms of advanced level participation in formal education, the University of the South Pacific (USP) Emalus Campus, Port Vila has, in recent years, graduated the first local *ni-Vanuatu* doctorates.

Relationships: Development, education, knowledge and research

In this section, I return to the issues of process tied to different aspects of power that struck me in reflecting on the moratorium. In Vanuatu, the land and ocean and people living by them are inextricably tied to education and ways of knowing (Abong, 2013; Regenvanu, 2009). Recognition of and work on what is variously called 'traditional' or indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing has extended in recent years. In relation to sustainable development, Kothari (2007) has captured some of these relationships:

> Humanity's troubled relationship with the earth has raised a series of questions on how to change our behaviour. How can we live more sustainably? . . . Do we have with us the necessary wisdom and knowledge to make this happen? Increasingly, it is being realized that answers to these questions will have to come from a variety of sources. While *earlier it was thought that modern science and technology will provide the answers, it is now more than ever clear that traditional knowledge also has critical insights and practices to offer*. (p. 6, italics inserted).

The importance of the nature of knowledge, its location and historicity is underscored there, and Kothari goes on to discuss the vital relationship between education and language:

> A language (oral or written) is not only a means of communication between members of a people or community, it also contains within it the essence of considerable information and knowledge and wisdom of the people or community. Its loss is therefore a loss of TK. The threat is greatest in the case of TK that has passed down

> and evolved orally, since it disappears with every generation that has not been able to hand it down to the next one . . . Across the world, as one model of modern education and means of mass communication spread, newer generations of traditional peoples are simply not imbibing TK in the way that their parents or ancestors did. (p. 8)

The critical role of the VCC and its fieldworkers' language work, the role of non-*ni-Vanuatu* partners, and the importance of measures such as the moratoria identified here, can be considered in this light. Likewise, research approaches—how we conceive of, conduct and share it—are integral to the ways that the forms and values of communication and education captured in this quotation spread. Existing plurilevel initiatives for recognition and protection of traditional knowledge range through national ones such as these identified in Vanuatu and other Pacific island nations, to Pacific regional ones and globally, pertaining to individual and teams of researchers.

Within these initiatives, dynamics around seniority and other distinctions based on aspects of personal identity, like age, gender and locality, are addressed and negotiated. While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss in more detail, Table 2 offers examples of these activities and statements in relation to Pacific plurilevel contexts.

Table 2: Examples of plurilevel recognition and protection of traditional knowledge

Level of activity	Initiative
Global	UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Ethical Guidelines/Code of Conduct for International Comparative Social Science Research UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (but see Fairbairn-Dunlop, below, on tensions between *individual* rights conceptions and communal, relational ones)
Regional/ sub-regional	*Tofamamao Statement*; Guidelines on Pacific Health Research (Health Research Council, 2005, in Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2007); UNESCO Regional Pacific Ethics of Knowledge Production Kakala Research Framework (Fua, 2014) and other Pacific metaphors (Sanga, 2013) In 'Pacific Ethics and Universal Norms', Fairbairn-Dunlop (2007) argues that 'the Pacific challenge is to develop a post-colonial ethics discourse that is "Pacific in philosophy and locally grounded in context'" (p. 9; see also, Du Plessis & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2009)
National	National research policies (Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji); other protection of TK—Uganda, Philippines, India (Kothari, 2007)
Local	Institutional Research Ethics Requirements and Procedures; Fieldworkers in Vanuatu liaising/seeking permission from local communities

The emergence of these activities and discourses demonstrate increased attention to, and assertion of, context and identity and, again, underscore the culturally, historically and politically situated nature of education, knowledge and research that I discussed above.

CONCLUSIONS

Complex and particular cultural, demographic, geographical, historical, linguistic, political, and (post-)colonial features have shaped the relatively 'young' nation we know

as Vanuatu, and its engagement with contemporary international 'development' discourses. Education, research, and the knowledge that we co-/create and share through them are central to these features, in terms of process and substance. Such dimensions, likewise, shape the relationships between the actors who variously fund, promote, and research dynamics between development, education, knowledge, and research. As one of those actors, articulating this slice of my story has been a way to navigate these phenomena in a way that engages with rather than dismisses that complexity and my particular place within and contributing to it. A number of questions and themes remain. One is the concern that, as nation-centric activities (including some civil society activities), how policies and acts, like moratoria, can address plurilevel, globalizing change while protecting national and local interests, and knowledge, which are themselves also dynamic (for example, considering council membership composition). It follows to ask how they are interpreted and applied, and to whom—aid agency research, funders? There is the large and small question, set at the start of this article, about identities, but also institutional and professional requirements of researchers—as individuals and institutional members—and within neo-liberal climates carrying associated demands of 'knowledge economies'. How, then, to navigate varying academic conventions: written, oral, and audio-visual documenting? With this, we return to questions about the understandings and limitations of insider/outsider (foreigner?) conceptions, ideas of standpoint, related methodologies, and wider ways of negotiating contemporary complexities through collaborative investigations.

In this auto-ethnography, I have offered a layered, reflexive account of my experiences of the 2013/2014 Vanuatu research moratorium as a plurilocal educator-researcher, in an era characterized by aspects of globalization and plurilevel education and research interactions. In doing so, I have considered the personal and plurilevel ethics and politics of research. From this position and through these lenses, I have understood Vanuatu's research moratoria as being tied to recognition and protection of *kastom* and knowledge, knowledge ownership within wider plurilevel decolonizing discourses of self-determination/sovereignty, and aid dependency. I have, in turn, shared my reconsideration of how we think about existing, including my own, research approaches within globally dominant conceptualizations of knowledge and development.

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