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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

The colonial education system

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Transitions from tradition to global

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

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

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

Quality teaching and learning in the 21st century

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

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

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

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

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

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

Case study: Tawase village

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

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

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

METHODOLOGY

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

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

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

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

INFORMANTS' ACCOUNTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Community sinews

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

Impact on the school

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LESSON FROM BOTSWANA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

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

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

DISCUSSION

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

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

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

Totoka village and school

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

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

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

Fiji Ministry of Education

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

Should schools have a role in upholding culture?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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