

Introduction

This book is the outcome of a partnership between the School of Education, Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), and the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. The partnership, funded by New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency to build capacity in the School of Education, began in mid-2006 and will formally end at the end of 2010, although the strong links and relationships between the staff at the two institutions will continue.

An important goal of the partnership was to begin developing a research culture within the School of Education. This has occurred in many different ways, including evidence-based practice, programme evaluations, and encouraging students to read more widely in educational literature. Here we found a singular lack of resources that directly address issues of Solomon Islands education, with the exception of two recent titles from He Parekerekere at Victoria University of Wellington.¹ Almost all the chapters in this book refer to the lack of local material in their area of investigation. It was this lack

of indigenous resources that resulted in the use of inappropriate texts and readings in schools and higher education during the mission era, but also since greater state involvement after independence.

A number of staff at the School of Education, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), the Curriculum Development Centre and SICHE have studied for masters and doctoral degrees in other countries—Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and the United States—before returning to take up leadership positions in the Solomon Islands. As part of their studies they carried out research projects that resulted in the completion of academic theses. These theses contain invaluable material that was largely inaccessible to a wider audience, even though they reported on field work carried out in the Solomon Islands and the interviews on which the research was based had been conducted in pidgin. The length, complexity, academic language and unpublished nature of the theses meant that few readers were able to access them. Through the partnership, we conceived the idea of publishing a book that contained chapters from a range of these theses, all of them examining and illuminating aspects of Solomon Islands education, in order to make the research findings available to policy makers, teachers and students.

A number of Solomon Islands researchers were invited to take part in the project, though not all were able to accept. In the end, all those who contributed were graduates of the University of Waikato, which gave added emphasis to the importance of the partnership. Over a period of two years there has been ongoing conversation and mutual support as the writing progressed and the book took shape. Like their counterparts, who are emerging researchers and writers in New Zealand, the Solomon Islands academics did not find it easy to plan time for writing, did not see themselves as writers and were hesitant about their capacity to become published authors. This book is a testimony to their talent and hard work.

The 10 chapters in the book have been organised in three sections. The first section discusses systemic issues, including teacher education. It begins with a chapter on what is perhaps the most significant development in Solomon Islands education over the past 15 years: the establishment and rapid growth of community high schools, which have resulted in both local ownership and greatly increased participation in secondary education. Derek Sikua's doctoral thesis drew on his experience as Permanent Secretary for Education and his wide reading in decentralisation around the world, complemented by an extensive series of interviews. His chapter (co-written with Noeline Alcorn) shows the complexity of the process of developing the new schools, their success (as measured by exponential growth, initiated by local communities), and the need for resourcing and clear policies.

The second chapter, by Rose Beuka and Jane Strachan, investigates the aspirations Solomon Islands parents hold for their children's education. In her research Rose found that parents want schools to prepare their children for careers that will provide financial security and can be undertaken in both urban and rural locations. Although academic education is highly valued, practical skills are seen as necessary and she argues for secondary schools to offer a wide range of subjects. In the third chapter, Patricia Rodie writes of the self-perceptions new secondary teachers hold about their training and induction. Although they feel generally confident in their roles, all of them identified problem areas. Their main sources of support were other teachers and Curriculum Development Centre workshops, and they were hampered by heavy workloads and a lack of resources.

In Section two of the book three writers examine issues of school leadership, which they see as key to raising educational standards and implementing change. Donald Malasa and Collin Ruqebatu explore what effective leadership would look like and identify barriers to its achievement. Shalom Akao investigates the experiences of

female educational leaders and the reasons why becoming a female leader in the Solomon Islands is so difficult. All three stress the need for leadership training and professional development for new and established leaders, calling for these leaders to be encouraged to consider wider educational issues and theoretical frameworks for leadership, as well as developing social, cultural and political awareness. They also emphasise the need for ongoing support and the provision of resources for school leaders.

The third section focuses on wider curriculum issues. Susanne Maezama, whose thesis analyses what “really useful knowledge” would look like in a Solomon Islands context, updates her work by examining current developments. David Sade investigates the impact of professional development on teachers to help them implement the new technology curriculum, which depends on technological understanding and active student learning through problem solving. Solomon Pita explores teachers’ perceptions of IT and the extent to which they are able to integrate it into their teaching practices. Finally, Janine Simi examines student and lecturer understanding of special and inclusive education, and finds that students are totally ignorant of the concepts. She argues that key concepts and strategies should be addressed in initial teacher education and wider changes made to incorporate inclusion in national educational policy.

The process of putting together the book has been a collaborative one and a learning experience for all those involved. Our communication has straddled cultural differences and understanding, differing expectations and aspirations, and has had to contend with uncertain Internet connections and phone lines that do not always work. Some chapters were jointly written by Solomon Islands and Waikato colleagues. The publication is a testimony to the commitment and determination of all the talented and knowledgeable contributors to make time for the project in the midst of busy lives. It is my hope that it will serve a real need by providing information and challenging

thinking, and that it will also inspire others to believe they too can publish their work for a wider audience.

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Noeline Alcorn

Emeritus Professor

University of Waikato

Hamilton

New Zealand

1 K. Sanga & K. Walker. (2005). *Apem moa: Solomon Islands leadership*. Wellington: He Parekereke, Victoria University of Wellington; K. Sanga & C. Chu. (2009). *Living and leaving a legacy of hope: Stories by new generation Pacific leaders*. Wellington: He Parekereke, Victoria University of Wellington.