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From the ground up: Weaving a *tok stori* of quality education

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Quality education is an often-heard term that has no single meaning. In this paper, we use the metaphor of mat weaving to structure an exploration of various elements that inform quality education. A warp of literature-derived threads is woven with the weft of practitioners' ideas of quality education to form the mat. These local perspectives were gifted through tok stori*, a Melanesian oral form, through a session held at the OCIES 2022 Conference at the Fiji National University. The session brought together frontline educators from diverse Pacific settings to explore the dynamics of quality across contexts 'from the ground up', a seldom investigated direction. The woven discussion includes explorations of tensions between colonial pasts and the present and points to hopeful expectations about the not-yet-here. The resultant mat balances prevalent notions of quality that flow from distant places into Pacific settings with locally derived positional understandings and, in so doing, offers contextual flesh and currency to some of the key concepts valued by regional initiatives.*

Keywords: Quality education; Pacific; contextualisation; tok stori; localisation; Fiji; Samoa; Vanuatu.

INTRODUCTION

Quality education is more often mentioned in educational discourse than it is defined. However, exactly what people mean by this term is significant because seeking quality education absorbs time, energy, money and other resources. Inappropriate definitions of quality education can lead to communities being poorly served by irrelevance or, worse, by socially and culturally erosive educational initiatives.

Quality generally denotes how good or bad something is. Claims of quality, therefore, involve judgements or evaluative statements informed by context. According to Hirst and Peters (1970), "'educating' people suggests a family of processes whose principle of unity is the development of desirable qualities in people" (p. 19). Desirability is also a contextual commodity. From this point of view, quality education focuses on processes that successfully grow skills, such as aptitudes, knowledges and abilities, that groups value. This approach is helpful for its processual and multifaceted emphasis and is valuable in a climate where the markers of educational quality can be reduced to potentially misleading numeric indicators (Thorpe et al.,

2023). Hirst and Peter's thinking admits both formal education, sometimes called schooling, and informal education—separate but potentially linked aspects of Pacific life.

In this article, we take a storied approach to investigating what quality education might mean in diverse Pacific contexts. We use the metaphor of mat weaving, a ubiquitous and well-understood activity in the Pacific region, as an organising feature. The weft of our investigation is formed by the contextual stories of four individuals gifted as part of a conference *tok stori* session and clarified and developed through subsequent *tok stori* engagements. The warp is provided by a conceptual discussion that links individuals' stories, framed by key aspects of the literature. The result of the weaving process foregrounds some contextual dynamics of quality education and points to thinking about what would be useful to contextualise. In this way, the article honours cultural ideas anchored in the past to map ways forward for regional initiatives that aim to deliver quality education.

We begin with a brief general literature review, which points to the significance of position, conceptualisation and change in considering what quality education could mean. The focus is then regionalised through two significant Pacific documents, *Tree of Opportunity* (Pene et al., 2002) and the foundational document of the *Pacific Regional Education Framework* (PacREF) (PacREF, 2018). We developed five points to form our warp from this activity. We then discuss the *tok stori* methodology before introducing the contributors and their individual stories to form our weft. The stories are then brought together through the analytical weaving process in light of the literature. Finally, honouring mats as purposeful artifacts, we offer observations regarding the usefulness of the exercise.

QUALITY EDUCATION IN THE LITERATURE

The literature on quality education is vast. Here, we feature two of many literature reviews chosen for differences in breadth and approach.

General literature

The comprehensive work of Barrett et al. (2006) reviewed how educational quality in low-income countries has been understood by international agencies, a significant group for the Pacific region in terms of funding. The review examines high-level documents and establishes five dimensions of quality education. The first, effectiveness, captures the degree to which education meets the needs of individuals and society and also examines the functioning of institutions, particularly schools. Second, efficiency is a dimension concerned with the extent to which inputs – generally money and other tangible resources – lead to desired educational outputs. Third, equality examines how well education is being accessed by the disadvantaged. Fourth, relevance looks at relationships between education, development and the purpose of education. Fifth, the dimension of sustainability, an ill-defined concept, sees quality as a present- and future-focussed matter.

Barrett et al. (2006) suggest that one's role or position in education informs the conceptualisation of and the balance between the five quality elements. For example, they suggest an economist's worldview dominates World Bank thinking with the result that dimensions, such as effectiveness and efficiency, are emphasised. By contrast, the United Nations-sponsored Education for All (UNESCO, 2002) movement stresses the dimension of equity. Structural position informs where people look when discussing and measuring quality. The result can be that notions and quality indicators can be generated at great physical, social and cultural distance from those intended to benefit.

A more recent review by Yoo et al. (2019) examined 121 papers from selected academic journals between 1960-2010. This temporal scope adds time as a dynamic to discussions of quality education. Yoo et al. found changes in the prevalence of four lenses used for conceptualising quality education: the post-colonial lens, which identifies quality in anti-elitism, consequent inclusion, increased consideration of local circumstance and the reduction of one-way teaching-learning relationships; the input-output lens in which quality reflects the degree to which education serves development; the human rights lens that values economic, political and cultural development (expanded by some to include human and environmental security and sustainability); and, finally, the social justice lens, which finds quality in the way education works to overcome inequalities and equalises the distribution of wealth and opportunities.

Yoo et al. (2019) report that the input-output lens numerically dominated their 50-year sample. However, from the 2000s, the human rights perspective on quality education grew, as did the social justice approach from 2010. The post-colonial lens remains relatively underrepresented. Overall, their analysis suggests that economically founded ideas of quality education are still dominant and that where quality is being rethought, it is through other 'universally' framed lenses, such as human rights and social justice. They report that cultural sustainability and more local and contextual rethinking of education are becoming part of the overall discourse of quality education but in relatively muted forms.

Key Pacific documents

Focussing the discussion on the Pacific region, Pene et al. (2002) provide papers that formed the written foundation for the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for Pacific Peoples (RPEIPP) initiative. The word 'quality' occurs in Pene et al. at least 65 times in contexts such as the educational relevance of human values and qualities, good citizenship, teacher training, responding to colonial legacies, the balance between school and informal education and the potential roles of local communities in introduced educational systems.

As initial advocacy research, Pene et al. (2002) made a case for change to encourage local Ministries of Education to clarify country visions for quality education useful in future dialogue with donors (personal communication, K. Sanga, 20th July 2023). A post-colonial lens is evident in a critique of input-output lenses on Pacific education, quality as efficiency, absence of relevance and weak emphasis on sustainability, especially in the cultural domain. The papers in Pene et al. point to the tension between universal ideas of quality education and local definitions in a context where education historically has offered inadequate rewards for the investment of Pacific peoples.

The more recent *Pacific Regional Education Framework* foundational document (PacREF, 2018) refers to quality over 50 times. The preface describes quality education and training as fundamental steps towards knowledge and technology-driven economies, sustainable societies and cultures for Pacific Island Nations. One of four policy areas links quality and relevance. Relevance is imagined in programmes and learning environments where values, knowledge and skills are locally derived, learning is holistic, a rights-based agenda is prevalent, and learning is not elitist nor used to exclude others. Teacher professionalism is a second policy area centred on quality, recognising the significance of teachers in the education of the young. Unresolved tensions can be seen in PacREF between universal and local ideas of quality, social and economic focusses, 'soft' measures of quality such as well-being and 'hard' measures such as achievement data and, finally, the pasts of colonial histories and the future of self-determining entities.

Key points: The warp

Although the sample of literature discussed here is limited, the ideas involved make possible five helpful points about quality education to form the warp for our weaving. First and most obviously, the concept of quality education is evidently hard to define conclusively. Second, one's position in education is likely to be reflected in the balance between and conceptualisation of various elements that define quality. This affects how quality is measured and, consequently, judgements about its presence or absence. Third, links between quality education, post-colonial contexts and sustainability are significant in the Pacific region. Fourth, there is potential to incorporate local Pacific values within pedagogy and curriculum as aspects of quality in the region. Finally, the significance of contextualisation is apparent through its relevance as an element in quality education. These observations provide a platform that suggests the value of the garnering of stories of frontline educators to offer positional insights and deeply contextual thinking about quality education in the Pacific, a region where the influence of colonial education still resonates. These five points will be reprised later.

METHODOLOGY

This paper arises from a session convened at the Oceania International and Comparative Education Society (OCIES) conference held at the Natabua Campus of the Fiji National University between 21–23 November 2022 and convened by Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington and Fiji National University. The session was titled '*Quality Education: A tok stori'.*

Tok stori denotes a Melanesian orality, a traditional conversational form that, in research, validates the whole person so that emotions, experiences, physical, mental and spiritual dimensions, and relationships are all valued (Sanga & Reynolds, 2023). *Tok stori* is dynamic; by weaving narratives, speakers come together as a collective, intensifying relationships and enhancing mutual understanding (Iromea & Reynolds, 2021). The form has been used in conference settings to produce papers that articulate keynote contributions (Sanga, Johannson-Fua et al., 2020), discuss relationality (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019) and explore *tok stori* itself (Sanga et al., 2018). In the present case, *tok stori* is used to explore quality education.

The data in this paper is centred on a one-hour *tok stori* session at which four of the authors were invited speakers, and the fifth was chair. Following that session, further digital *tok stori* sessions were staged to expand and clarify ideas from the initial session, and emails were also exchanged. Contributions were given in English, recorded, transcribed and analysed using Informed Grounded Theory (Thornberg, 2012), a process that involves coding data by testing initial sensitising concepts. In this case, initial codes derived from notions of quality education in the literature were shaped/augmented according to the *tok stori* data. This process drew from the evident tensions in the relevant literature while providing a frame for the contextual contributions of the speakers. The process was coordinated by Martyn Reynolds, an educator with 35 years of experience who is originally from the United Kingdom but now holds a post-doctoral position at Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand.

In line with the weaving structure of this article, we now offer narrative moments about quality education from the speakers in the order of the conference as weft. In each case, we first provide a short biographical statement as context.

THE STORIES – THE WEFT

Stori one: Dominique

Dominique Mahuri, from Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, has been a teacher for 15 years. He is currently working as a school Principal under the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training.

Vanuatu is a country comprising over 80 islands in a chain in the western Pacific Ocean. It can be described as part of Melanesia, characterised by cultural diversity, indicated by the 140+ languages spoken there. Vanuatu's education system has evolved significantly over the years. As former colonial powers, the British and French played a key role in shaping Vanuatu's educational landscape, contributing to literacy and numeracy teaching. Both colonial powers established separate educational systems, reflecting their beliefs, culture and language. After Vanuatu gained its independence, a unified education system was sought whereby cultural diversity, local languages and traditional knowledge would be included in the curriculum. Efforts have since been made to improve education quality and promote inclusivity.

Dominique is mindful of the way French and British colonial legacies have shaped schools in Vanuatu, which has resulted in a dual state system, with attendant markers of quality represented in literature through a narrative of unpayable school fees, low literacy and insufficient school places (Hughes, 2004) and by reference to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (McCormick, 2016). In Dominique's experience, however, communities see quality education as 'about embracing their values, giving back to the community, respecting communal protocols and norms and establishing lots of relationships within the communities'.

The centrality of community in local definitions of quality education in Dominique's *tok stori* integrates the human and the non-human—the notion of community is inclusive. Community embraces 'shared concepts—consciously or unconsciously. The river, the bird, the mountain, they all affect the whole in one way or another'. Quality education, therefore, is holistic and, from Dominique's point of view, has three elements: the teacher, the student and 'the space – the school that is your house . . . the values . . . the church . . . the environment . . . the physical space, what they [learners] see, meet, say'. This approach asks the question: 'What does a child learn on the way to school from the bush they walk through on the way?' as well as what is taught in classrooms. Informal education and schooling are proximal and integrated.

In the Vanuatu context, living a *kastom* life is a choice for many. While some may see this as 'rejecting modern goods and services, for example, clothes, food and education (Hughes, 2004, p. 357), *kastom* holistically embraces traditional practices and values as positives to the extent that *kastom* schools have been set up. Among their functions described in the literature is the transmission of traditional ecological knowledge, reinforcing the integration of people and their environment. Dominique speculates that the origin of *kastom* schools in the 1980s involved elders from villages realising they needed to teach the young to be ni-Vanuatu and that borrowing some structures from the missionaries, such as schools, would be a way forward. As such, *kastom* schools are 'an adaptive approach to the transmission of *kastom* and culture' (McCarter et al., 2014, p. 5).

Some children stay in *kastom* school and later blend into the *kastom* economy, and some migrate between systems. Dominique's experience suggests that those who leave *kastom* school and come to the state school system bring evidence of valuable, high-quality learning. 'They give respect to protocols, keeping up traditions. They behave differently [to students who have not attended kastom schools]—they attend, listen, are concerned with doing things "properly"

or in an orderly manner.' Consequently, it is clear to him that 'kastom schools have an important role in promoting behaviours, attitudes and skills' with transferable potential. This is in addition to cognitive knowledge, 'agriculture, survival skills, meditation, stories, songs, the (traditional) calendar and language', featured in *kastom* schools.

For many Ni-Vanuatu who engage with the formal education system, Dominique says the outcome of a qualification is 'a plus', in addition to being 'skilful and knowledgeable in kastom'. In rural schools particularly, the concept of quality education includes *'being able to conform to the rules, to live in traditional society'*, to be able to do important things well in the community. 'Having a qualification doesn't equal being qualified. Giving respect, weaving into the right way of doing things, how you behave—these are the evidence of quality learning, of who you are before you go to school.' School should not strip these facets out because 'these are the reasons you will be respected and listened to more'. Thus, while the *kastom* school system sits parallel to, but separate from, the state system, *kastom* ideas of quality underpin thinking in both.

Stori two: Vilieve

Vilive Cagivinaka is from Fiji. He has been an academic and a teacher educator for 24 years and works for the Fiji National University. His expertise includes teacher education, higher education administration, programme development and review.

Fiji is located in the central Pacific and is often described as Melanesian. The most common language spoken is English, followed by Fijian or iTaukei, the language of the Indigenous people, which comprise 62% of the population (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The Bau dialect is considered the standard language among the iTaukei. Fiji Hindi-speaking Indo-Fijians, the descendants of indentured labourers (Whitehead, 1981), comprise 34.2% of the population. Sub-groups exist within that community linked to religion and cultural groups, further complicating the ethnic situation (Goundar, 2017). Other ethnic groups comprise the remaining 3.8% of the population, many hailing from Pacific Island countries (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Puamau (2001) suggests that colonisation impacted the lives of Indigenous Fijians, including by transforming the Fijian traditional learning system and values, introducing Eurocentric agendas and disregarding indigenous knowledge. The widespread use of English in schooling and elsewhere highlights the persistence of colonial structures in this post-colonial era.

The geographical setting of Fiji shapes the education system. Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, the two main islands, are both rugged and mountainous, complicating communication between and within them. Many outer islands remain relatively isolated. Schools in remote areas are managed mainly by the iTaukei and have predominantly iTaukei students. Christian missionaries established schools attended mainly by the iTaukei, later adopted by various provinces, communities and Christian denominations. Indo-Fijian communities also established schools, mostly affiliated with Muslim or Hindu groups (Whitehead, 1981). These can be differentiated further based on cultural connections, such as Sangam and Sikh. Management of Indo-Fijian schools previously reflected these layers, enabling the promotion of cultural and ethnic interests. However, the government took over all community-based schools in 2014, restricting the role of school committees. Consequently, cultural and religious practices were removed from schools.

Fiji's diverse and inclusive society presents a multifaceted challenge for policy and decision-makers. However, despite the complexity, which leads to differing definitions and perspectives on quality education, shared themes and interests transcend differences (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2004).

Vilive recognises Fiji's complexity when imagining what quality education might mean in Fiji. He proposes the ubiquitous Pacific fruit salad as a metaphor that accounts for the pattern of representation that sits at the heart of quality education. 'The various fruits are in there. You need all the fruits in [appropriate] proportion so that when you enjoy the fruit salad, you are not only tasting one fruit. You should be able to taste all the fruits . . . Otherwise, it is not a quality fruit salad.'

At a national level, the metaphor points to the need for balance and inclusion in the curriculum since one of the functions of education in Fiji should be fostering unity through mutual understanding. Diversity of religions and ideologies brings social and cultural wealth but raises concerns about respecting the rights and fulfilling the needs of all citizens (Lingam & Lingam, 2014). Balance among the cultural 'fruits' is a challenge for the Fiji Ministry of Education. To Vilive, the metaphor is also essential at the individual level. Learners 'should be able to taste themselves, see their needs being addressed and see something relevant to them. They will not be pleased if they fail to find themselves in the salad. There will be resentment.'

In this complex situation, the metaphor provides a broad base for ideas of quality, recognising the legitimacy of diverse views of parents and communities. 'For some, their idea of quality is good grades. Others see quality if education provides a decent job. And some parents send their children to school to be a good person'. Vilive says that from an iTaukei perspective, embracing goodness may entail upholding the environment, treating people with respect, safeguarding and venerating traditional customs and observing language. Because economic, social, and cultural outcomes variously feature as markers of quality education, an inclusive salad is required to conceptualise purpose, answering the longstanding regionally significant question, 'Education for What?' (Bugotu et al., 1973) in layered, nuanced ways.

In Fiji, quality education is not an individually held value. In Vilive's experience, education is 'not for your personal benefit, but for your community'. iTaukei people have obligations within the vanua (Nabobo-Baba, 2006, 2008), the place-centred spiritual and philosophical backbone of Fijian life, as do other Fijians within clan, family and religious structures. Therefore, quality education is characterised by the ability to make substantive and appropriate contributions to one's community(ies). This can be captured by the notion of *solesolevaki*, 'communal collaboration' (p. 146) or 'collective community effort' (Movono & Becken, 2018, p. 151). *Solesolevaki* is a form of social capital implicated in the mobilisation of Fijians both now and in the past, contributing to social sustainability and coherence (Raisele, 2021). To Vilive, *solesolevaki,* as an element of quality education, has great potential to support Fijians going forward at village and nation-building levels. Modelled on 'solidarity in the traditional community', *solesolevaki* is a marker of quality education 'because you cannot achieve [success] on your own'. *Solesolevaki*, in the context of quality education, extends in time so that the benefits sought are for 'the people that are behind me, my Vanua, my relatives, my children'.

The fruit salad metaphor of quality education stands in contrast to the past. Vilive says, 'We've been accepting one structure, the European western structure. It has not worked. It has failed us. We have gained confidence now to start questioning.' Rejecting imposed narrow notions of quality in education embodied in individualism and competition has made space for more 'fluid' ideas. Times have changed, and in Fiji, 'the indigenous people will not be isolated anymore. We need to live together. The iTaukei have been living with others, accepting them and giving them a home. How can others live with us? Can we accept each other's distinctiveness and keep our own in a peaceful, coexisting environment? Now, the world has become smaller in the sense that everyone is connected. Therefore, the concept of quality now

encompasses education that is friendly to everyone, not just a select few.' Quality education as a fruit salad requires balance, temperance, careful listening and the confidence to approach difficult conversations with respect and hope.

Stori three: Sereima

Sereima Baleisomi is from Macuata, Fiji. She is a lecturer in primary education at the Fiji National University.

For her thinking on quality education in Fiji, Sereima turns first to one of her parents. 'My mother would say, "It's no point having so many qualifications when you don't have the wisdom to be wise. If you have so many qualifications, but you cannot make wise decisions, it comes to nothing." That's one perspective on quality education.' Sereima maps the holistic qualities of wisdom as involving 'the head, the hands and the feet,' a unity in which 'knowledge, skills and attitudes work together in complementary ways'.

A cultural reference given by Sereima in her story is *yalomatua*. Tuimavana (2020) explains *yalomatua* as 'wisdom' or 'mature spirit', denoting when the *yalo* or soul gains the status of the *matua* or old. A person can be young 'but behave in adult-like status [and] have an attitude to become self-sufficient or self-reliant [which] permeates their whole being' (p. 89). *Yalomatua* is contextual in that it depends on what people value. 'For those who value traditional relationships, yalomatua would mean knowing your relations, knowing how to perform traditional practices, and so on. For those who value education, yalomatua would mean prioritising schoolwork, managing time well, and so on.' *Yalomatua* as quality education involves gaining information and being 'able to use and interpret', which might lead to 'A grades' but, more importantly, to 'wise decisions for the self and community'. A mark of the absence or presence of quality education is that 'the whole people is shamed or praised'. To Sereima, quality is expressed in 'the balance between the individual, the individual-in-relationship, the collective'. When significance is given to 'emotion, yalo, the spirit or inner person—the economy of mutual care, you'll know your relationships and relational obligations and will have the higher knowledge of the home. And then if you get a qualification on top of that, that's like the icing on the cake. It's not the cake.' The quality of education, therefore, can be found in the weaving of two knowledges of school and home rather than placing these in competition or opposition.

Balance, however, is not easy. Looking individually, Sereima recalls, 'One time I saw this boy. I was trying to walk into a supermarket, and then he had a whole bucket of roti to sell. This is during school, mind you, so I think for the parents, education it's not a priority. I think the priority was putting food on the table.' This story tells that where poverty exists, the enabling potential of school knowledge can be sacrificed for more immediate needs and gaining any quality in or from formal education becomes impossible.

Obtaining a balance is not simple at the national level. Sereima recalls deliberate attempts to bring the iTaukei and Indo-Fijian communities together in classrooms through language. 'The teacher training college tried to teach conversational Fijian and Fiji Hindi. You know, in the hope that when [trainees] go [out to school], at least they would be able to code switch at a conversational level'. One aim was to balance the representation and wisdoms of each group in the teaching space. A second was the reasonable hope that by hearing their own language, 'the students will feel more welcome in the space . . . breaking the ice between the teacher and the student.' However, Sereima admits 'it didn't work'. This linguistic and relational initiative aimed at living well together took place in a context where '[we've] been together in this community in Fiji for more than a century. But [we] haven't picked up conversation language.'

Bilingualism has generally involved English rather than Fijian/Fijian Hindi, reinforced by the education system. This shows one way past and present relationships affect the balances involved in quality education in colonised contexts such as Fiji.

These language-centred recollections return the story to the question of culture when constructing a fruit salad of quality education in Fiji at the classroom level. As Sereima says, '[Vilive] is talking about culture, but my question is "Who's culture?" In a diverse society like Fiji, whose culture do we promote? Is it the students' culture or the teachers'?' Sereima's questions about what quality might mean point to cultural democracy (Helu-Thaman, 2009) and asking questions is 'a positive start'.

Stori Four – Moe

Onelau Faamoemoe Hakai Soti is from Samoa. She has 15 years' experience at the Curriculum Division, Ministry of Education. Moe has also been an academic and a teacher educator for the same period and currently works for the National University of Samoa.

Samoa is made of nine volcanic islands, the main ones being Upolu and Savai'i. It has an international reputation as a tropical paradise. This image can mask social, political and economic challenges, including providing an education system to serve the country's present needs (Tuia, 2019). Samoa became independent from New Zealand in 1962 and was previously under German administration. Various villages have their own protocols, but compared to some other Pacific jurisdictions, Samoa is culturally and linguistically uniform, with Gagana Sāmoa being spoken across the country.

Moe's story of quality education focuses on teachers and their training. Education is a relational practice in which students' cultures have a place, but in which the cultures that teachers carry, both personal and professional, are also part of the negotiation, which provides parameters for quality. From this point of view, quality is constructed in the relationships between 'qualified teachers', who have spent time studying various forms of effective knowledge transmission, have gained subject knowledge beyond the ordinary, and know about how learning happens. 'Quality learning resources' are materials that can be used effectively in pedagogic ways because, for example, they are relevant, significant and reflect local experience. 'Quality ongoing professional development' recognises that the world is not static and that education is a journey that no teacher ever completes.

Moe suggests that in her context and according to her research, evidence of quality is a matter of layers, in that teachers 'shape and mould the younger generation of their country' to be 'good and useful citizens', children acquire the knowledge 'to be successful for their age at school', and pedagogic activities performed 'challenge the brains of the children'. These layers co-locate the social, academic and cognitive as aspects of education relevant to quality.

Prior to the arrival of the missionaries in the 1830s, Samoan life was mainly focused on family and village lifestyles. Everyday tasks such as cooking, fishing, hunting, weaving, housekeeping and boat building were used as education of the young (Coxon, 1996; Faoagali, 2004; Petana-Ioka, 1995). However, under colonial administration, a hierarchy was established so that practical activities were relegated compared to academic 'book' work. Under the Pastor school system from the 1830s, practical work was placed in a hierarchy based on gender. For example, it was assumed that Food and Textiles Technology education was to prepare young girls as *faifeau's* (ministers') wives and as mothers. The relegation of these areas of the curriculum continues to be a problem.

A further holistic aspect of Moe's vision of quality education is that teachers should not only teach children but also embrace the needs of parents. If they find some parents 'who only want [their children to be] lawyers, doctors, while collar workers', teachers have a role in delivering both the 'academic core' such as literacy and numeracy and 'practical subjects'. In some cases, parents need education to appreciate the quality of this balance by not favouring the historic attention on academic education of colonial education. In a dynamic situation, Moe suggests teachers also feel the pull of the past so that professional learning and development, which encourages teachers to avoid a 'drift back into the past' will preserve a situation where 'they are doing their job to work hand-in-hand with students'- *focusing* on learning through a relationship of partners rather than as a distant expert. These matters address the issue of whether quality Samoan education involves the preservation of the educational past or is an agent of change seeking a more locally relevant educational future (Pereira, 2006).

Moe tells a research story of enacting this layered vision of quality from the point of view of her specialist area, Food, Textiles and Technology. She recalls that the quality of education 'can vary . . . where teachers were struggling to teach without teaching resources in a mainly practical oriented subject' like Visual Arts, Health and Physical Education and Music. If quality here is a balance or integration of action and thought, 'teachers need more power to explore teaching and learning in the classroom and its capability to develop intellectual skills and higher-level thinking' so that no false separation divides the practical and academic.

To bring depth to practical activities, 'professional development for teachers should emphasise not only [practical] skills and knowledge'. Still, it should enable teachers to 'explore their own values and beliefs in developing content and pedagogical experiences to change teacher practice'. This, in turn, requires attention to 'the conditions that surround teacher professional development'.

On a practical level, quality in teacher development includes a dual focus: on students through 'assisting schools to be more selective when focusing their training and development on student learning needs' and on teachers 'developing strategies to change classroom teaching practice'. In systems terms, a progressive journey towards quality is supported by 'ongoing induction for the new teachers to develop teaching goals, knowledge and strategies that they need', including 'ongoing teacher training at school-based level'. Unfortunately, experience tells Moe that 'some of the school principals had never allowed this to happen in the schools'. For example, 'some principals do not link the importance of the thematic approaches of teaching and learning the core subjects versus the practicals in the classroom'. Moe's story shows how ideas about quality education require enactment at the micro level and places emphasis on the quality of educational leadership, capable of embracing *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan philosophical) ideas of leadership (Finau, 2017) as a key aspect of quality education since teacher education *is* student education.

DISCUSSION: WEAVING THE MAT

We now turn to weave together the warp of five points developed from the literature and the weft of the four stories from the *tok stori* to produce a mat that we hope will be of value.

First, the four frontline narratives reinforce the first point that quality education is hard to define, even when discussion is limited to the Pacific region. Dominique's *stori* provides a clear distinction between markers of quality held in *kastom,* and those which are typically used in education systems introduced to the region, such as examination passes; Vilive and Sereima's

stories illustrate how ideas of quality vary across and within communities in Fiji; and Moe's experience shows how different members of the teaching profession seem to understand quality in varied ways. Glib, unelucidated use of the term 'quality education' in the Pacific is likely, therefore, to be problematic.

Second, the narratives support the point that one's position in an education system affects ideas of quality. Our aim has been to present a 'bottom-up' perspective. This contrasts with 'top-down' views. Our reading of Barrett et al. (2006) suggests that quality is theorised primarily through efficiency and effectiveness when seen from both 'above' and afar. However, the frontline positions given here by Pacific practitioners stress elements such as relevance and sustainability, particularly in cultural terms. These elements may seem less solid than statistical measures used for assurance of efficiency and effectiveness but are, nonetheless, both visible and clearly felt in the four narratives. The presence of *solesolevaki* and *yalomatua* as indicators of quality education are examples, as is the integration of hands-head-heart and/or social/academic/cognitive in education as markers of quality in the stories of Sereima and Moe.

The salience of links between quality education, post-colonial contexts and sustainability suggested as the third point by our literature review is given flesh by the four contributions to our *tok stori*. These show how ideas of quality constructed in the wake of colonial history vary. In Dominique's context, *kastom* schools borrow from colonial institutional structures but provide a village-based alternative fitting to those who value a *kastom* economy. The presence of *kastom* schools also provides the basis of opportunities to migrate to and from the state education systems and, therefore, provides a choice on how to engage with education in its introduced form in Vanuatu. The fruit salad metaphor gains power from Fiji's post-colonial population diversity. It provides a thought platform for the potential contributions of education to unity-in-diversity in Fiji's multi-ethnic context. Moe's observations involve a partnership between learners and teachers, an element of the post-colonial lens developed by Yoo et al. (2019). When Moe speaks of a 'drift back into the past' on the part of teachers who are not sustained by continued professional learning, she refers to the power of inertia that maintains the dominant role of teachers over learners derived from colonial educational models. Cultural sustainability is the subtext of concepts such as *kastom*, *solesolevali* and *yalomatua* in accounts of quality education.

Echoing a theme from Pene et al. (2002) and central to the RPEIPP initiative, the practitioners' narratives illustrate the fourth literature-derived point by showing various ways to integrate Pacific values into pedagogy and curriculum. Across the various cultural references, a central axis is the link between quality education and benefits to the group. Although elements of quality education, such as effectiveness and efficiency, and lenses, such as the input-output lens, may value benefits to the country-as-group through economic development, there are differences between this and the *tok stori* accounts in terms of scale and tangibility. Quality in the four narratives is constructed at a small scale; for example, for Moe in classrooms and schools, for Dominique in villages and culture groups, and for Sereima in community collectives. Paradoxically, the visibility and tangibility of attitudes and actions in small-scale contexts contrasts with the intangibility and immediate invisibility of the benefits that accrue to the national collective from, say, the examination successes of individuals.

Finally, our weaving heightens the significance of contextualisation, the core of the fifth point derived from the literature. Since quality is subjective and the 'desirable qualities in people' (Hirst & Peters, 1970, p. 19) that justify education are contextually sanctioned, seeking ideas of quality from the frontline is a valuable exercise. Contextualisation is a layered phenomenon that ranges from changing to embrace a few local words or names in thinking from distant

places to wholesale reconsideration of the purposes of education (Sanga, Maebuta et al., 2020), the visions and values that underpin the work of educators, and the way quality is framed in each context. Ontological ideas such as holism, time and relationality underpin various ideas in the narratives, as do contextual political perspectives, such as the appropriate balance between the individual, collective and nation in education and the role of culture in schools. Further, context means negotiating local relationships between formal (school-based) education and informal education. This involves a discussion about the permeability of the spaces between the two, indicated by Dominique's story of walking to school, and between wisdoms speaking from the past, such as the words of Sereima's mother and the imagined demands of unknown futures, present in Vilive's remark that quality education is tied to 'the people that are behind me, my Vanua, my relatives, my children'. Context is significant in these matters since there is no universal way of experiencing education or defining quality.

CONCLUSION: THE VALUE OF THE MAT

This article has woven a warp derived from international literature and key regional documents and a weft of *tok stori* contributions from frontline educators from the Pacific region to form a mat that we hope will be useful in inviting further thought and exploration. Mats can be beautiful but should always be useful. Therefore, we conclude by offering some thoughts about the usefulness of the communal exercise we participated in.

First, we reiterate that no assumptions can be made about the meaning of quality education. The mat warns us that assumptions give power to the assumer that affects everybody who 'sits' in the model of education which eventuates.

Second, the mat has been made by weaving various sources of evidence about quality education. This balances the seductively easy-to-collect forms of evidence (often used to support effectiveness and efficiency as cornerstones of quality education) with hard-to-quantify but locally visible results of education, such as the embodiment of attitudes and the enactment of values. These are aspects that support sustainability and relevance as mainstays of quality.

Third, the weaving process we have employed suggests that Pacific education would look very different if the direction of consultation were adjusted to listen more carefully to frontline practitioners who have deep knowledge of context. The writers in Pene et al. (2002) knew this well, and we hope those charged with progressing PacREF also recognise the potential of frontline consultation at conceptual and practical phases of initiatives. Asking questions of frontline educators has great potential.

Within our stories, a wide range of elements of quality education presented by frontline educators is present. Story 1 shows the significance of behaviour, attitudes and culture in concepts of quality. Story 2 shows how sweetness and balance are potential indicators of quality when the importance of peaceful, honourable co-existence is understood. Story 3 highlights the salience of the balances between the individual, the individual-in-relationship and the collective in understandings of quality education. Story 4 points to the quality of educational leadership as a key aspect of quality education since teacher education and student education are two sides of one coin. This rich range of elements reflects positional, experiential and contextual wisdom about quality in education and counters reductive approaches to the field.

Turning to methodology, *tok stori* as an orality has proved helpful in investigating conceptual thinking informed by experiential learning. Investigating matters such as quality education through oralities does not produce tidy or simplistic answers but can expand the discussion. Complex and hard-to-define ideas can be more completely appreciated as a result. Careful

weaving can produce insight from diversity and commonalities from differences. It also honours the separation and individuality of *stori* strands.

Finally, we hope that our exercise in weaving honours Epeli Hau'ofa's (1994) vision for our region, a sea of islands in which diversity is a strength as we negotiate the tensions between colonial pasts and the present we all feel in education. Collective work is a source of inspiration that has enhanced our appreciation of each other and points with expectation to the not-yet-here.

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