Editorial
Education in the Pacific: Rethinking partnerships

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Education in the Pacific region is at a crossroads. Pacific governments are faced with complex challenges in attempting to fulfil service delivery and support to their education systems, while at the same time attempting to manage commitments to global and regional education agreements[1].

This special issue journal aims to provide a critical understanding of how the notion of 'partnership'[2] is constructed in various Pacific education contexts and with reference to a number of educational development initiatives at regional, national and local levels. Because of the extent to which education development in the Pacific is externally financed, exploring how 'partnership' is enacted and worked out at these levels requires that it be located within the globally agreed 'aid effectiveness agenda'.

Increasingly since 2000, in conjunction with the various global declarations entered into by official multilateral and bilateral development agencies active in the region, there has been clear convergence both in development objectives and delivery models in the Pacific. Global agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the targets set by the second Education For All conference (World Education Forum, Dakar, 2000) increasingly have determined *what* educational aid should be allocated to in all development contexts including those of the Pacific. The mechanisms for *how* educational aid should be delivered have also been structured within the aid effectiveness agenda, most significantly by the *2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which strongly promoted the sector wide approach (SWAp) as the aid modality most likely to strengthen partnerships between donors and between donor and recipient.* The sector wide approach is now being engaged in across the region by most of the major donors.

This issue highlights that - despite the growing number of 'new' international development actors (e.g. European Union, Peoples' Republic of China) involved in providing significant amounts of financial support to education in the Pacific,

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[1] There is an emerging research literature exploring the ways in which geopolitical changes and global shifts in development discourses influence education development in the Pacific. For example, Coxon, 2002; Coxon & Taufe'ulungaki, 2003; Sanga and Taufe'ulungaki, 2005; Coxon & Munce, 2008; Cassity, 2010.

[2] Noted here is that the discourse of 'partnership' is closely aligned with the discourses of 'participation', 'ownership' and 'harmonisation'.

and the ongoing education development assistance provided by countries such as Japan and Taiwan, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank and various UN agencies, Australia and New Zealand continue their historically established role as major bilateral donors to education in the Pacific region[3].

How the Australia and New Zealand governments have sought to influence Pacific education through their official aid programmes over the past decade has undoubtedly been shaped by the aid effectiveness agenda's focus on 'partnerships' – between aid donors (now known as development partners) and recipient governments (now known as partner governments), and between state and non-state actors (civil society and/or private sector partners).

Furthermore, many Pacific governments are signatories to the Paris Declaration; and, in 2007 regional leaders endorsed a set of Pacific Aid Effectiveness Principles, developed by the Pacific Forum Secretariat in close alignment with the Paris Principles. Following on from this, the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF), released in March 2009 by the Pacific Forum Leaders, now identifies harmonisation as one of its guiding principles. Harmonisation is defined as:

> ... a shared commitment between countries and development partners to align development activities with partner countries' national priorities; and giving importance to the national leadership role in coordinating development assistance with a focus on managing for results. (PIFS, 2009, 5)

Noted too is the extent to which Australia and New Zealand have worked to strengthen their partnership in the Pacific. This was demonstrated by the signing of the *Australia-New Zealand Partnership for Development Cooperation in the Pacific* on 9 August 2009. The Partnership focuses on the language of "shared vision", "common strategic direction", and "complementary approaches to development in the Pacific" (Commonwealths of Australia and New Zealand, 2009, p. 1). The *Partnership* was endorsed as a first step in implementing the *Cairns Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination* signed by all members of the Pacific Islands Forum during their meeting on 5-6 August 2009. The central goal of these agreements focuses on achieving progress in reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

At the level of rhetoric, 'partnership', as the coordinated participation of development partners (bilateral, multilateral and non-governmental) is perceived as the means of creating a more equal relationship between aid donors and recipients. For partners to work effectively towards the same goal their

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[3] A number of the articles analyse both the delivery of educational aid from Australia and New Zealand and their relations with Pacific island countries. This fact reflects the influence of Australia and New Zealand on education development in the region. It is acknowledged that it also could be seen as reflecting the relationship between this journal and the Australia New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society (ANZCIES), and the location of both the editors and many of the writers. As can be seen in the 'Notes on Contributors' section, however, each of the authors has extensive and recent involvement in Pacific Education 'on the ground'. Also noted is that a significant number of the writers is indigenous to the Pacific islands region. Because each writer adopts a research approach that locates education within wider economic, social and political processes, the critical dimensions of context and culture are forefront in each article.

relationship must be equal, transparent and open. Furthermore a partner-driven development programme requires that the recipient should take the lead in defining its development needs.

In terms of actual practice, however, the actual workings of the 'partnerships' indicates they are more to do with establishing what the donors agree as more efficient management structures and processes, than addressing historically formed power differentials between aid donor and aid recipient (Eriksson Baaz, 2005).

This special issue of *IEJ: Comparative Perspectives* aims to generate a rethinking about partnerships in Pacific education in terms of the concepts, issues and events outlined above. It explores different experiences, priorities and outcomes of partnerships from a range of perspectives. This range of perspectives is critical to this special journal issue because "one of the most important contributions of international and comparative education journals is the variety of voices and places that they bring to an international literature that is too often dominated by voices from a tiny proportion of nations, looking internally at those settings and assuming that their findings have global reach" (McGrath, 2011, p. 1). This collection of voices seeks to disrupt the domination of the few and expand the body of knowledge from the Pacific. As with many regions of the world, global agendas have enormous impact on the Pacific region, but in different ways.

The notion of regionalism has been a salient reality in the Pacific islands region since colonial contact. Kabini Sanga explores regionalism as a development strategy for service delivery. In doing this, he uncovers that partnerships are generative and consist of a range of relationships encompassing both tension and opportunity. Sanga explains a general theory of regionalism and how, in the Pacific, regionalism is a collective venture. Regionalism is context-bound. His discussion of the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for and by Pacific Peoples (RPEIPP) explores the paradoxes of regional and national, and how these paradoxes are shaping the future of Pacific regionalism.

If regionalism embodies a range of relationships, then by definition it addresses a rhetoric of shared visions and common strategic directions. Christine Fox explores partnership in the Pacific from a critical postcolonial perspective. She interrogates the unequal power relations of international donor-driven projects in the Pacific, and critiques the meaning of the word *development*. Fox then uses the Australian Agency for International Development's (AusAID) *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness* (2011) to explore AusAID's presentation of 'partnership' as a strategic alliance and ownership over management practices of a partner relationship. While international discourse and educational provision indicate a focus on partnerships, in fact, Fox argues, power relationships between Pacific island countries and donors have changed little.

Hilary Tolley's article picks up on the theme of discourse and power in partnerships. She explores the specific 'partnership' arrangement of a Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) as envisaged by New Zealand's bilateral aid programme (NZAID) and the Ministries of Education of Tonga and Solomon

Islands. Tolley discusses the etymology of partnership, uncovering its foremost position in the hierarchy of international development discourse parlance and its likely potential of being a relationship of 'unequals' where tensions exist between partners. Importantly, Tolley reminds the reader of the relevance of context where particular moments defined relations between partners in Tonga and Solomon Islands.

Alexandra McCormick builds on the notion of unequal development partnerships in exploring the positions of civil society actors and particular Education For All (EFA) goals in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. By using Critical Discourse Analysis, McCormick analyses how particular elements from global rhetoric are taken up in national education policies. Her discussion focuses on the power of language to define education goals, and how critical actors are often omitted from policy discourse, which she names 'policy struggles'. In the Pacific, McCormick finds that regional and subregional actors have attempted to explore unity while at the same time recognising local particularities. This invariably includes paradoxes, as Sanga argues earlier in this issue.

Ritesh Shah investigates the dilemmas of partnership in Timor-Leste's basic education sector. Shah discusses the additional factor of state fragility, where high levels of distrust exist among partners and capacity of state institutions is comparatively weak or non-existent. Shah examines international declarations that address partnership frameworks for fragile states, but like McCormick, he questions whose interests are included in such frameworks given the voices that are summarily excluded. In other words, the very idea of 'consensus' is fraught. The reader is not only reminded of the different dynamics of fragile states in partnership, but also the importance of context. In Timor-Leste donors and government have worked together to strengthen service delivery, but the drivers of education itself – the teachers and students – have been excluded from the partnership picture.

Juliana McLaughlin examines the myriad of educational partnerships that have been and continue to be reframed and redeveloped in Papua New Guinea. At the heart of her article is the notion of authentic partnerships for development education. From a postcolonial perspective this notion takes into account the unequal power dynamic that exists between former coloniser and colonised – in this case Australia and Papua New Guinea – and demands that this dynamic be interrogated in a transparent way. McLaughlin questions the donor-driven initiatives for elementary teacher education and outcomes based education. As Tolley, McCormick, and Shah all argue, context is crucial – development itself is ambiguous with education goals too often defined by donor agencies (or 'external partners' in millennial development-speak), and 'authentic education' as defined by McLaughlin that addresses local realities is in danger of being suffocated by global agendas.

Like McLaughlin, Jack Maebuta considers the kinds of education that are relevant to supporting children's participation in democratic Pacific societies. Maebuta explores the Learn and Play Project (LPP) in Solomon Islands through an Integrated Theory of Peace Education (ITPE). As with Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands is a post-conflict state and this has framed the education and partnership

challenges faced by its citizens. Maebuta explores how the Solomon Islands Football Federation (SIFF) developed an education partnership with the LPP to address the plight of disadvantaged rural children. An overseas donor funded the programme. What Maebuta discovered was that a focus on the partnership and developing a culture of peace within the project resulted in a programme embraced by a local community.

Education systems interact with local communities in different ways, and it is the local that ultimately shapes the outcomes of education reform. Alan Male explores the developments leading up to the reform of the secondary school system in Samoa from 1995-2002, and how effective the reform programme was in creating equity for students within the secondary system. Male uses the theories of distributive justice and social reproduction to analyse the extent to which the system has been made more equitable. Male concludes that while the partners 'desired' to make the education system more equitable, history and a legacy of structural inequity have continued to undermine all students gaining equitable access to secondary schools offering ongoing Year 12 programmes.

Baleinakorodawa, Spence and O'Loughlin describe the process of dialogue and its importance in bringing multiple partners together to advance the processes of peace building and development. As representatives of a Civil Society Organisation (CSO), the authors underscore the significant position of CSOs in building connections with multiple stakeholders in Fiji. Ethnic and social divisions in Fiji create a number of tensions in the working relationships of CSOs and other development partners. The authors have found that collaborative networks of CSOs are emerging in Fiji, and these organisations are willing to engage in with local socio-cultural complexities. They name a number of practical actions that encourage partnership in fractured societies.

Community education entails addressing issues that are socially and culturally complex. Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop discusses the importance of community education in the prevention of Violence Against Women (VAW). Fairbairn-Dunlop also notes that changing aid modalities embraced by the international development community are at odds with NGOs' roles as community educators. In other words, as donors give resources to governments, the engagement between governments and NGOs is being undermined. As recognised by other authors in this issue, a number of voices – in this case NGOs and community education – are missing from debates. At the same time, as an issue VAW has gained visibility in the Pacific as a result of global and regional recognition. Fairbairn-Dunlop has found that there is a regional-national pattern emerging in terms of donor funding and NGO partnerships. She describes the relationship between the Vanuatu Women's Centre and Fiji-based VAW NGOs. As with the article by Baleinakorodawa et al., Fairbairn-Dunlop traces how a non-government sector is reconfiguring itself in order to share knowledge and resources about critical issues outside the traditional scope of donor funding – these include peace building and dialogue in Fiji and addressing VAW in Vanuatu.

This special issue is significant in that it highlights the extent to which global and regional partnerships attempt to frame educational goals. It also explores the

extent to which Pacific governments and local stakeholders – the key actors in Pacific education, including education aid and development processes – might be marginalised from international development discourses that determine the so-called partnerships that set out to shape education development in the Pacific. In exploring the tensions between the global/regional agenda and the complex realities of national and local educational contexts, this collection of articles makes clear how national/local social and cultural agency mediates the effects of globalisation and regionalisation.

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