Research Note

Understanding the Indigenous Context for Peace Education in Temotu Nendo, Solomon Islands

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Abstract: *Conflict is one of the major obstacles to the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly the sector goals of universal completion of basic education and achievement of gender equality in primary and secondary education. As conflicts are increasingly happening around the world, many countries recognised peace education as an important tool in conflict prevention and in the reconstruction of post-conflict societies. Hence, it warrants high priority in both post-conflict reconstruction and the future civilisation of peace. This paper focuses on understanding the indigenous context for peace education in Temotu Nendo, Solomon Islands. It examines the nature of Temotu Nendo indigenous knowledge and skills, the concept of nowe-peace and how this concept enables appropriate indigenous approaches to teaching and learning of the principles of peace. The paper concludes with implications for the peace education curriculum and highlights the author's peace education topic and questions that form his doctorial research.*

Introduction

Like most other developing countries in the world, the Government of Solomon Islands has shown enormous commitment to post-conflict reconstruction and the achievement of "Education for All" (EFA) through its various educational reform programmes. Central to the Government's education sector reform is the integration of peace education into the school curriculum. It is against this backdrop that this paper is set to examine the significance of understanding the indigenous context of peace education in *Temotu Nendo* of Solomon Islands and it derives implications as to how these practices and perspectives could be adequately integrated in the school curriculum.

What is Peace?

Peace research literature highlights different approaches to peace education that may influence people's view of what peace means. Within the indigenous context, peace holds different connotations in which peace is practised. Galtung (1969) distinguished peace as inner and outer peace. An inner peace is a state of being that revolves around accommodating reverence for others, while outer peace relates to the environment, culture and other outermost interrelationships. Within these two spheres comes different meanings and concepts about peace. Galtung further defines peace within the parameters of positive and negative peace. To him negative peace is the cessation of violence and positive peace is establishing standards for justice, human rights and sustainable development in communities.

Nowe: Temotu Nendo's Concept of Peace

So what is peace in Solomon Islands culture? In *natgu* language on *Temotu Nendo,* the concept of peace is termed as *nowe* which connotes a calm sea or still crystal water. This implies that the calmness of the heart embraces open-arm interaction in the community. Hence, when there is any conflict it has to be resolved so that atmosphere of calmness again

overshadows the community. The coinage of this concept is rooted in the relationship between the sea and any natural disasters like tsunami. A tsunami does not trouble the sea for a very long period but just for a very brief moment and then the sea returns to its normal state of calmness. It is through this conceptualisation that the *Temotu Nendo* culture views conflict and violence as brief social disaster that has to be dealt with promptly so that the calmness of the community is not disturbed. *Nowe* as a fabric in Solomon Islands peace education curriculum has the potential to address ethnic hatred, environmental destruction, interpersonal conflict and structural violence. This cultural concept of peace has been levering the mediation and reconciliation of conflicts and violence in *Temotu Nendo*.

Indigenous Knowledge and Practices

In the recent past, many scholars were engaged in indigenous research. A number of people have studied indigenous knowledge system in the Pacific (Smith, 1999; Grant and Giddings, 2002; Thaman, 2002; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Nabobo-Baba, 2006). In the words of Gegeo and Watson (2001) knowledge is generated through "critical reflection on culture, history…politics, economics…in which [people] are living their lives" (p 59). Thus positioning research into indigenous practices calls for techniques that reflect that culture (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). Researchers who want to investigate any aspects of culture and/or indigenous practices must first come to terms with the constituents of that culture as the foundation of indigenous knowledge. Gegeo and Watson (2001) in their analysis of Solomon Islands' Kwara'ae knowledge system write:

> *Kastom* embrace culture, tradition, norms and modes of behaviour, ways of thinking, doing, and creating; and of course, indigenous epistemology. Anything born of the land and passed from generation to generation is part of *kastom.* Indigenous epistemology is an inextricable part of *falafala*-custom (p 59).

In many Solomon Islands cultures, *kastom* canvasses knowledge that is important to indigenous people. Therefore, traditional protocol must be accorded when one wants to research indigenous practices.

Traditional Setting for Teaching and Learning Principles of Peace

Madei is the common traditional setting where the principles of peace are observed or taught to young generations of *Temotu Nendo*. *Madei* is a store house of indigenous wisdom, knowledge and practices. The village elders usually congregate in *madei* and teach their young generations about the *kastom* of *Temotu Nendo*. Similarly, village conflicts are mediated by the elders in *madei* as this setting is traditionally built to frustrate the shooting of arrows in any traditional warfare.

The *madei* has a rectangular fire place in the middle to warm elders and to light their smoking pipe. In any gathering, it is the protocol that *madei* is laden with betel nuts so that elders are entertained by chewing betel nuts while they mediate conflicts. After a conflict is resolved, the elders would reiterate the principles of peace while appropriate traditional compensations are paid. When the compensations are distributed to the conflicting parties, the mediators in the presence of all the people would highlight the significance of the compensations and their values to maintain *nowe* in the community.

When men and boys are sitting in *madei* with their elders, women are not allowed to ask their sons or husbands to come out. The traditional significance of this is that in *Temotu Nendo kastom,* men are earmarked to *nata tongam* (earn income) so while they are congregating in the *madei* they are learning ways of earning income from their elders. Thus, women's

interruption to *madei* proceedings is traditionally believed to be followed with a curse when the husband or son is going to try out the income earning skills.

Implications for Peace Education Curriculum

Understanding the indigenous context of peace in *Temotu Nendo* has implications for the peace education curriculum. The first implication relates to curriculum and culture. Curriculum and culture are contested terms and may have differing meanings as influenced by one's orientation and perspective. A vast body of literature defines the concepts of culture and curriculum within the Western orientation and can be problematic in the contexts of the worldviews of most of the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands (Thaman, 1988). In the Pacific Islands worldview, "culture is taken to mean the way of life of a discrete group of people, including its body of accumulated knowledge and understandings, skills, beliefs and values" (Thaman, 1993, p 249).

Given this relationship, adaptation of the curriculum in the Pacific Islands indigenous context constitutes "a selection from the culture of a society, of aspects which are regarded as so valuable that their survival is not left to chance, but is entrusted to teachers for expert transmission to the young" (Lawton, 1975, p 9). If we accept Lawton's definition of curriculum and Thaman's definition of culture, the selection of curriculum content is largely determined by the best of a culture in terms of shared knowledge, skills, beliefs and values. To many Pacific Islands educators, this is what is meant by a culturally inclusive or appropriate curriculum. The development of such a curriculum must be guided by a culture-sensitive model (Thaman, 1991).

Second, the teacher as a driver of a culturally-inclusive curriculum also deserves consideration. As Lawton (1975) argued, a culture-based curriculum must not survive by chance but should be entrusted to teachers for its transmission. Therefore a culturally-inclusive curriculum can only be taught meaningfully if the teacher-education programmes are also culturally-inclusive. It is for this reason that consideration of the cultural context of teacher education is important (Thaman, 1992).

The two critical questions in the study of peace education curriculum are: Who determines what is best of a Solomon Islands' culture? How can the best of peace education practices be selected? In Solomon Islands, the selection of curriculum content has been influenced by colonial ideologies which saw high regard for academic oriented curriculum with strong focus on western concepts. This has made the teaching of indigenous values, skills and attitudes as insignificant or even does not have a place in the formal school curriculum. In the ethnic conflict, some of the best of Solomon Islands' culture were manipulated for personal and political gains. Therefore, a peace education curriculum selected from a manipulated culture holds no value as a platform for future generations. It is against such concerns that the integration of peace education into school curriculum occupies an important place in Solomon Islands post-conflict reconstruction. Hence the critical stance in the integration of peace education is a curriculum selected and informed by the indigenous beliefs, values, practices and perspectives. When these indigenous lenses form the basis of peace education in Solomon Islands, the curriculum will be relevant and meaningful.

Finally, the best method for teaching peace education in *Temotu Nendo* schools is to contextualise peace education within the peace concept *nowe*, the common causes of conflict and their appropriate mediation and resolution strategies. Teaching peace education outside these contexts would not help students to practically understand the concepts of peace, reconciliation, healing and unity.

Conclusion

It is this context of peace education that the author conceived his proposed PhD research which is focuses on the topic: *The role of education in peacebuilding: integrating peace education into secondary school social studies curriculum in Solomon Islands*. This paper sets the foundation to further investigate the *Temotu Nendo* indigenous peace practices and perspectives and it will become a chapter in the thesis that also provides the orientation to answering the fourth research question. The research questions that guide the study are:

1. What are the critical features of peace education?
2. What are the features of the current secondary school curriculum in Solomon Islands?
3. Do the features exhibited by the current secondary school social studies curriculum policy and practice reflects the critical features of peace education?
4. How adequately are indigenous-based peace practices and perspectives reflected in the peace component of the secondary school social studies curriculum?

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