Sustainable Living in the Pacific: Exploring the role of Multiculturalism in Teacher Education

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Abstract

The Pacific is arguably one of the most diverse regions in the world, both culturally and linguistically. Although much has been said about the relationship between culture and education, the topic of multiculturalism in education is one that remains unexplored. Although sporadic discussions have occurred with reference to the fourth Pillar of ‘living together’ in the Delors’ report, much of the discourse surrounds the need to incorporate cultural knowledge and culture inclusive pedagogies into local curricula. The author is of the view that quality educational development requires an examination of multiculturalism in teacher education and training. This paper presents the argument that the Pacific needs multicultural teachers who value and prioritize a variety of ways of learning, knowing and being. The development of cultural, cross cultural and multicultural competencies is therefore essential as these contribute to a teacher's ability to meet diverse student learning needs. Multiculturalism can no longer be seen as the enemy of culture. Instead it should be recognized as a natural progression from culture inclusive education to an inclusive education which recognizes and values the authenticity of all students' cultures and values based on the realities of the diverse Pacific society, and the globalized world.

Introduction: Pacific Education for the 21st Century

"In the beginning God gave to every people a cup of clay and from this cup they drank their life. They all dipped in the water but their cups were different." An Indian Proverb

The UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity was adopted on November 2nd 2001 at the 31st Session of the UNESCO General Conference. As a Catholic, November 2nd has special significance as it marks “All Souls Day” or “day of remembrance” of the faithful departed. The personal connection that I find meaningful in the adoption of this declaration is the joint legitimization of the authenticity and value of cultural and linguistic diversity of indigenous and minority groups alike and their contribution to global diversity. In a sense it is almost an acknowledgement of those who have gone before us; a recognition of the ancestors of all of humankind and their contribution to the world.

Matsuura prefaces the declaration by summarizing its aims and foci:

The Declaration aims both to preserve cultural diversity as a living, and thus renewable treasure that must not be perceived as being unchanging heritage but as a process guaranteeing the survival of humanity; and to prevent segregation and fundamentalism which, in the name of cultural differences, would sanctify those differences and so counter the message of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration makes it clear that each individual must acknowledge not only otherness in all its forms but also the plurality of his or her own identity, within societies that are themselves plural. Only in this way can cultural diversity be preserved as an adaptive process and as a capacity for expression, creation and innovation (Matsuura 2001, p1).

This paper presents the argument that in order for a more inclusive educational approach to evolve in the Pacific, adequate consideration must be given to multiculturalism in education or more succinctly, multicultural education (ME). Such an approach would ensure
that all children are ensured a quality education that is contextualized and that is based on the lived experiences of the communities from which they come.

It also follows that teacher education should be the focal point of this conversation as teachers who themselves value the significance of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region are more likely to proactively promote such a teaching philosophy in their teaching practice. The advantages of such an inclusive educational approach are three-fold. Firstly, its contribution to the development of quality relevant education for the 21st Century in the region and promotion of the regional approach that is being advocated in the economic and political arena. Secondly, a change in teachers’ values, attitudes and beliefs would have direct impact on Pacific schools and classrooms. Thirdly and finally, ME is education for all. It is inclusive of all students’ educational needs and prioritizes their learning experiences and contexts.

Culture and Pacific Education

A wave of awakening is sweeping across the Pacific. By this wave, I refer to the paradigm shift in local and regional focus of all things Pacific from economics to politics and education is no exception. In the education sector, what has emerged is a call for a rethinking, reclaiming and re-imagining of education from its outcomes to curricula, in terms of both epistemological and pedagogical considerations. The main thrust of this re-envisioning process is the need for quality educational reform in the region.

Quality educational reform demands a future-based curriculum framework that considers both the historical journey as well as predicated future movements of an education system. The curriculum definition provided by Wylie (1970) springs to mind:

A curriculum is rather like a tripod with one foot planted back in past traditions, one foot set down in present beliefs and practices and one foot extended ahead into predicted requirements and hoped-for improvements for the future (Cited in Connell 1974, p34).

The appeal of Wylie’s definition is that it is holistic in its encapsulation of what the curriculum should entail. In my view, it is unfortunate that such a holistic approach to curriculum development is particularly lacking in Pacific island countries (PICs). Educational change in the region can be simplified into two main categories: (1) the attempt at alignment with international standards and movements, and (2) initiatives to address problems within the system.

While there has been some progress in Pacific education movements such as the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative (RPEI), such Pacific-initiated, Pacific-owned and Pacific-centered approaches are far and few. What appears to be particularly absent is the proactive and continuous change factor essential for progressive curriculum development for the future. Many of the changes in the region are initiatives strongly influenced and developed by aid donor countries, most commonly Australia.

For the most part, a lack of local resources, including finance and an overdependence on consultants from aid donor countries, is often the cause of this lack of proactive local educational development. That is not to say that the will or expertise is not available within the region, but quite simply the reality of aid relations and the challenges of development faced by small island states.

Taufe’ulungaki (1987) is succinct in her summation on the post-independence educational dilemma faced by PICs. She argues that although Pacific Islanders recognized the need for post-independence educational reforms, there was inadequate local capacity to address these issues (cited in Bray & Parker, 1993, p. 95). In a later piece of writing, she argues: “The failure of education in the Pacific can be attributed in large measure to the imposition of an alien system designed for western social and cultural contexts, which are underpinned by quite different values” (Taufe’ulungaki 2002, p.15).

This view was shared by the majority of Pacific educators at the 2001 Institute of Education -NZODA Colloquium on Rethinking Pacific Education held in Suva, Fiji. The end result of this new-line thinking resulted in the formation of the Re-thinking Education Initiative (RPEI). The RPEI marks an active response to the recognized need to re-orient education in the Pacific given the prevailing remnants of the Pacific’s colonial pasts. Such a rethinking is also recognized as essential given the forces of globalization that have and will continue to influence development in the region (Nabobo 2002).

Thaman explains the conceptualization of the RPEI;

The RPEI, a network of Pacific educators, committed to re-thinking what they and their countries are doing and working towards improving education quality through sustainable use of Pacific people, their values, and knowledge systems. RPEI has inspired so many Pacific educators to share experiences and network, using modern technology to do this and to stay connected to one another (Thaman 2007, p.5).

What most educators seemed to be saying at that colloquium is that schooling in the Pacific is for the most part inappropriate and irrelevant to the contexts of Pacific learners. Most contributors to the ensuing volume of writing from the colloquium felt that the learning experiences of Pacific learners are hollow and lack a Pacific focus. Sanga (2002, p. 58), for example, states: “… the schooling experience appears to be influenced more by global ideas, others’ grounds of knowledge and introduced concepts, thereby neglecting to transmit local cultures to future generations of Pacific children.”

Thaman (2007, p.1) elaborates on this further:

The education system that we in Oceania have inherited from our colonial masters taught us quite different things from that which we learned from and experienced in our own indigenous education systems. For example at school we learned that important knowledge came in different packages called subjects, and in order to be educated, we needed to pass examinations in these subjects, the content of which were mainly irrelevant and meaningless to us…

Despite regional efforts in education, the ensuing initiatives, for the most part, are country based and lacks an effort to create a sense of regional identity. One such example is the USP based Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of basic Education (PRIDE) project which is charged with the responsibility of overseeing relevant and much needed education development in PICs. The official website of the PRIDE project highlights its overall objective: “To enhance the capacity of Pacific education agencies to effectively plan and deliver quality basic education through formal and non-formal means, and to improve the coordination of donor inputs to assist countries implement their plans” (USP 2007, n.p). The PRIDE Project which is owned by fifteen member countries reinforces regional

ownership of the project. Regional workshops and subprojects also reinforce this regional approach however; the main emphasis of the PRIDE is to provide national support.

Similarly, the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA) provides services in assessment and evaluation to PICs as well as the establishment of Pacific based examinations and certifications. Its mandate does not cover the establishment of such a regional consciousness. The board’s key functions include assessment training and support, regional qualifications, accreditation, information and communications technology and research and corporate management (SPBEA Strategic Plan 2007, p1).

Such initiatives are reflective of the current regional approach adhered to in the Pacific which provides forums where regional dialogue takes place. Much of the discussion, however, surrounds how PICs can better respond to their own respective challenges. That is not to say that such efforts are not essential or purposeful. The point is, however, that there is currently a gap in the current trends of regional thought. That is, a lack of incorporation of regional diversity into the curriculum of PICs for the purpose of nurturing a regional identity and focus in education.

A common approach used for curricula to focus on the local and the international, leaving an obvious regional gap. Filling this gap would support current approaches to regionalism and more importantly contribute to the development of a regional consciousness and identity which has yet to be addressed in education forums or curriculum development of the island countries.

What needs to be examined, first of all, is the relevance and need for such a regional identity. Are regional efforts such as the Pacific Plan, the Re-thinking Education Initiative and PRIDE simply a means for PICs to channel their own specific efforts or does a regional approach require by definition a sense of belonging or regional identity? I would argue that the latter is what is needed in order for an authentic regionalism to occur.

Hau’ofa alludes to this when he says

We [Pacific Islanders] have floundered, also, because we have considered regionalism mainly from the point of view of individual national interests rather than those of a wider collectivity; and we have failed to build any clear and enduring regional identity because we have continued to construct edifices with disconnected traits from traditional cultures and passing events, without basing them on concrete foundations (Hau’ofa 2000, p43).

One area which could contribute to this regional identity building, but has not received adequate consideration in Pacific education is that of cultural diversity within the region. While many Pacific educators such as Thaman, Sanga, Taufe’ulumgaki, Teaero and Nabobo among others, have written extensively on a number of cultural issues in education, such as (1) the need to utilize education as a vehicle for cultural promotion and (2) to facilitate meaningful learning; discussion has focused for the most part on cultural inclusion rather than cultural diversity.

In 1991 a UNESCO sub-regional seminar which was held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands saw Pacific representatives argue for the better contextualization of teaching and learning (Thaman 2002b, p8). The following year, the Pacific Association of Teacher Educators (PATE) was established at USP. One of the first issues raised at this meeting was “…the
importance of cultural contexts in teacher education as well as the need for all teacher educators to create more culturally democratic environments for trainees” (Thaman 1992, Cited in Thaman 2000, p4). In 1995, Thaman presented a paper at the consecutive PATE meeting where she presented ways by which teacher education curriculum could be adapted to incorporate Pacific cultural issues. Thaman, a pioneer in the culture and education debate in the region, surmised that despite the interest and commitment raised at these meets, her 1997 survey of selected teachers’ colleges and USP showed that “less than 20% of the content of the teacher education curriculum was derived from Pacific cultures and knowledge systems” (Ibid).

The starting point of the cultural diversity discussion must be the inclusion of culture in the teacher education curriculum. In this way, a solid cultural foundation may be used to develop a holistic appreciation of diversity and the challenges that teaching for diversity presents. This view is shared by Teasdale and Teasdale (1992) who argue that teachers need to value the cultural backgrounds of their students (Cited in Thaman 2000, pp3-4).

A point of view expressed by Thaman on cultural inclusion may be adapted for our purposes here. She says:

If, as in western nations, formal education is closely associated with the transmission of individualistic, industrial and scientific cultures, then in PINs [Pacific Island Nations], schooling should reflect Pacific cultures since the content of all education has value underpinnings that are always associated with a particular cultural agenda. (Thaman 2002a, p25)

Thaman goes on to argue that an outcomes-based education is based on an internal analysis of Pacific societies and cultures may be the way forward. She is adamant that:

…agreed on student behavior and performance described in terms of learning outcomes in the context of life in a particular Pacific country should form the foundation upon which to base decisions about school curricula, teaching, assessment and professional development. (Ibid, p29)

The social agenda of education provides the avenue through which cultural diversity may be pursued in a concerted manner that provides adequate focus of cultural issues without marginalizing issues in diversity.

Kavaliku’s reminder on the role and significance of culture in development takes us back to Wylie’s definition of curriculum development:

Culture is both an instrument for decision making and implementation as well as the end result of those policies and of the decisions implemented. Furthermore, culture is a dynamic reality. It changes either gradually or rapidly, over time. Indeed it is a system that changes with each new idea, new development, each new generation and each new interaction with other cultures and/ or peoples. Past cultures lend themselves to conservation. Living cultures are based on the legacies of the past, the ideas of the present and the hopes for the future (Kavaliku 2000, p23).

Given social and economic growth in the global arena, diversity is becoming more apparent in Pacific nations and because of this, active facilitation of the diversity in education discussion needs to take place. The diversity of the Pacific region as a whole and within PICs respectively as well as the growing diverse needs of students attending
Pacific schools indicate that diversity in education can no longer be viewed as a consequence of the cultural debate. Nor should it be seen as a competitor.

The relevance of Multicultural Education in the Pacific

The origin of multiculturalism in education or Multicultural Education (ME) can be traced back to the civil rights movements in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s, beginning with African American and colored people’s movements. This was followed by feminist movements and Gay and Lesbian groups, the elderly and people with disabilities. In the 1980s, the emergence of multicultural education reached the fore with the likes of James Banks and Sonia Nieto who argued that ME was inclusive education that catered for all students’ needs (Gorski1999, p1).

Today ME has taken many forms and names. It is sometimes referred to as Education for Social Diversity or Diversity Education. Its scope varies from specific racial, cultural and language paradigms to a wider range of issues including gender, sexuality, special and diverse needs, socio-economic background and religion.

For the purpose of this paper, the following definition of ME is adopted:

Multicultural Education is a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students, that incorporates, for this purpose, content, concepts, principles, theories, and paradigms from history; the social and behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women’s studies. (Banks and Banks1995, cited in Diaz 2001, pp11-12)

UNESCO recognizes culture as the foundational block upon which education for sustainable development is developed in its Decade of Education for Sustainable Development initiative (DESD). This raises many questions; first of all, whose culture? Secondly, are we to assume that indigenous communities possess homogenous cultures? And if this is the correct assumption, then, what of countries with vast diverse indigenous groups such as the Melanesian PICs of PNG, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands? If we begin from the standpoint that cultural diversity is a fact of life within PICs we may be more embracing of ME and the implications that it has for quality educational development. In this light, ME has foundational implications for Pacific education as reflected in the arguments below.

First of all, the social function of education gives the schooling process an important role to play in addressing the challenges that diversity presents. Secondly, it is sound philosophically, sociologically and psychologically in that it considers the shifting reality of the modern Pacific and of Pacific learners. It also promises a more inclusive, holistic and future based approach to curriculum development that addresses both local and regional needs as well as global movements such as the various UN’s conventions on Human Rights, Cultural Diversity and against all forms of discrimination. This includes the MDGs, Delors Report, EFA, CEDAW, Rights of the Child, and Indigenous and Cultural Rights.

While there may be some opposition to ME, what is required is clarity on what it purports to achieve. At this point it may be relevant to address some of the questions that may initially arise.

Is ME just another eurocentric educational agenda?
While initial critics may point out that ME is eurocentric in that it is an educational conception of the western world, arguably, the entire schooling process is a Eurocentric conception. However, what must be realized is that just as education is being re-conceptualized to suit local needs and contexts, similarly ME can be adapted to meet specific Pacific needs.

Does ME lead to a politicization of the curriculum?
ME must be distinguished from political multiculturalism. The two concepts are quite distinct in that multiculturalism is a normative response to diversity that multicultural social contexts present and is often based on political or organizational policy. ME, on the other hand, is an educational response to the diversity that the school and classroom presents based specifically on the learners' needs.

The belief that incorporating multiculturalism into the curriculum will lead to the politicization of education is as misinformed as an argument that Thaman's call for a culturally democratic curriculum politicizes education. Defenses aside, it must be understood that ME is not political in that it focuses on the educational needs of the learners in the context of the classroom by giving due consideration to the diversity that the classroom presents. This includes the social, cultural, religious and intellectual conditions of the background of each child, which in itself can be argued is the main goal of any quality education system.

Will promoting ME lead to a marginalization of cultural issues?
ME does not marginalize culture or indigenous initiatives. On the contrary, it embraces and nurtures such endeavors. Such a narrow view simply underscores the general lack of understanding of what ME stands for. ME does not view culture as relative, it values and affirms the authenticity of each cultural experience and uses these as a building block upon which to construct purposeful learning experiences. For that reason, ME should be advocated as an approach that promotes constructivism as it demands that teachers begin from where the learner is.

In order to clarify the many misconceptions regarding ME, it is essential that clear definitions of the purpose and scope of ME be clarified at the onset of the development process. The fact remains whether the focus is on national diversity or regionalism, diversity is a fact of life and teachers need to be prepared for this reality.

ME in Teacher Education

The first step towards ME is the development of multicultural competencies in teacher education programmes. This would enable a teacher to facilitate tasks that strengthen a sense of ‘Pacific' identity and community as well as ensure that all learning experiences and activities adequately consider students' needs and backgrounds.

Regardless, of one's standpoint on the question of whether ME is relevant or useful for PICs, a few truisms about ME should be acknowledged:
1. ME is Education for All;
2. ME is aligned with the Pillar of Learning to Live Together;

3. ME is supportive of the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity;
4. ME promotes peace and conflict resolution;
5. ME is education for sustainable development as it prepares students for the realities of the diverse world and equips them with the skills and values required for successful interaction and survival in that reality;
6. Every classroom is a multicultural classroom; and therefore,
7. Every teacher is a multicultural teacher who must be equipped with the necessary skill-set required for the facilitation of effective teaching and learning within a multicultural context.

In addition to content knowledge, there are a number of competencies that teachers need to possess in order to facilitate meaningful learning in the classroom. These include pedagogical skills and a value base that embraces diversity. This diversity is manifest in the students’ backgrounds, preferred learning styles, multiple intelligences and states of being such as gender and sexuality. A disregard of any one of these may inadvertently lead to the unknowing marginalization of any number of students in the schooling process.

For the most part, teachers are often unaware of their own ethnocentric or stereotypic views. An example which a USP teacher educator shared was a simple activity demonstrating trainee teachers’ latent gender stereotypes. Students were given an activity which required them to sketch a scientist. The results were astounding. All the sketches presented by male and female students alike, showed a male scientist in a white coat. An interesting follow-up to this activity would be to scrutinize these sketches to see how many of those depicted were ‘white’ male scientists and what proportion were indigenous scientists.

The development of multicultural competencies would ensure that teachers become more aware of their own preconceived beliefs and assumptions about their own and other groups, and the hidden curriculum ever present in their classroom. Such teachers are in effect more conscious of the messages that they are imparting to their students regarding specific groups whether they are cultural, ethnic, religious, gender or otherwise.

This reformation process begins with the examination of personal philosophies of education. Teacher education programmes need to be rationalized so that a clear inclusive vision or philosophy is articulated. It is essential that the correlation between the development of cultural and multicultural competencies to teachers’ practice be recognized in teacher education and training so that teachers’ may be in a better position to reflect on and articulate inclusive and holistic personal philosophies of teaching and learning.

Teacher Education as the preparation of trainees for the realities of the teaching field is simply capacity building for the responsibilities of the teaching profession. As such, it is expected that trainees develop necessary competencies for the duration of the program. This teacher capacity building includes the necessary beliefs and attitudes towards education, the teaching learning process and the role of the teacher, knowledge base (both epistemological & pedagogical), and the skills believed to be paramount in teaching practice.

The ‘teacher’ is expected to be a role model, a facilitator, a transmitter of knowledge, a researcher, a democratic leader, a manager and so forth. The discussion of the ‘good’ teacher is relative given that ‘good’ is an emotive word, subjective to the user’s criteria of what is worthwhile. However, it can be safely assumed that for most people, a ‘good’ teacher is one who fulfils his/her responsibilities well.

The socio-dynamics of the classroom necessitates the exposure of teacher trainees to humanistic approaches in teaching and learning as opposed to a clinical transmission of facts. This is particularly important in the case of ME as Gay (2001, p26) points out: “Multicultural education should not enter into classroom instruction in capricious, haphazard, or incidental ways. Some carefully conceived and well-planned schemata should govern its deliberate and systematic implementation.” Rather than adopt ME in an adhoc manner, teacher trainees must learn to value diversity and recognize the challenges that the classroom presents. What this implies is that teacher educators must first embrace and nurture these beliefs and values so that they may imbue their own instruction and so enable teacher trainees to do the same.

**Developing Multicultural Competencies**

Multicultural competencies are important for positive cross-cultural interaction. These competencies are needed for interaction in every sphere of human contact and are not restricted to classrooms and schools. These skills are important in the wider social community, in business communication, politics, and health care systems to name a few. Knowing how to engage in meaningful and acceptable communication and general interaction is therefore becoming increasingly seen as a common skill or general knowledge.

Despite the challenges and conflicts that we know arise due to miscommunication and misconception of acceptable modes of interaction, Pacific education has yet to consider multicultural competencies as a vital teaching competency. In my view, this should be a primary focus of education for the 21st century. McGee Banks (2001, p177) stresses:

> Cross cultural teachers are multiculturally competent. They are able to work successfully with students from diverse populations and to help students from all groups acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to function effectively in a pluralistic society.

Before we can begin to construct the ways and means of acquiring multicultural competency in teacher education programmes, we must first consider what multicultural competency means and what it entails. Generally, a competency is seen as a skill or aptitude for something, intelligence in a specific area or field. Cultural competency therefore begins essentially with what Thaman (2003) calls cultural literacy; a general awareness and intelligence of a culture and its knowledge base, belief and value systems and the ability to interact successfully within that culture. Thaman is of the view that both cultural and multicultural literacies must be acknowledged as significant to the teaching learning process. If we were to use by extension this same definition, cross cultural literacy or cross cultural competency means the knowledge of and ability to interact successfully and positively with another culture. In this same way, multicultural literacy or multicultural competency would mean having such knowledge about and skills to understand, interpret and interact effectively across and between many cultures.

In a discussion on developing multicultural competencies in teachers, McGee Banks has the following to say:

To become a cross cultural teacher, teachers must have a clear understanding of how their values, beliefs and other subjectivities influence their teaching. They also have to master an identifiable body of knowledge, skills and attitudes that constitute critical attributes of multicultural teaching. (McGee Banks 2001, p177).

When we embark on a discussion of multicultural competencies, we need to look for ideas from the wider society. One such area in which the challenges of diversity have been recognized is that of business. Writing on diversity in global business, Thomas and Inkson (2004) argue that a vital characteristic of positive social interaction between cultures is cultural intelligence. They define cultural intelligence as:

...being skilled and flexible about understanding a culture, learning more about it from your ongoing interactions with it, and gradually reshaping your thinking to be more sympathetic to the culture and your behavior to be more skilled and appropriate when interacting with others from the culture. (Thomas and Inkson 2004, pp14-15)

Thomas and Inkson identify three interconnected components of cultural intelligence as having the:

- Knowledge to understand cross-cultural phenomena;
- Mindfulness to observe and interpret particular situations; and
- Skill of adapting behavior to act appropriately and successfully in a range of situations (Ibid, p20).

In education, Gay (2001) provides a similar model for multicultural teaching. Her three pronged model identifies empowerment as the core goal of ME. She links knowledge, will and skill as the three core qualities that a multicultural teacher must possess. As she notes, “the ultimate answer to creating effective multicultural teaching practices is ‘empowering’ teaching to make better decisions for themselves within their own classrooms” Gay (2001, p38). She explains:

Empowerment here means having the knowledge, will, and skill to incorporate ethnicity and diversity to all routine teaching functions. Having ‘the knowledge’ means understanding how culture affects teaching and learning, being familiar with the cultural contributions of different ethnic groups to various disciplinary domains of knowledge and humankind, and knowing how various teaching tasks converge to form systems of teaching functions. Having ‘the will’ is possessing beliefs and values legitimacy of cultural diversity for people, schools, and society, as well as being enthusiastic in affirming, celebrating, and using these differences to enrich the educational process for all students. Having ‘the skill’ is being competent to translate multicultural education knowledge and systematic understanding of the nature into instructional practices that are more culturally responsive to ethnically diverse students. (Ibid).

With specific reference to ME, trainee teachers must be exposed to activities and intellectual debate that enable them to develop the skills required by multicultural teachers. The empowerment that is required by Pacific teachers is the knowledge, value and intrinsic sense of worth of their local communities; their histories and cultures and ways of doing, being and knowing as well as those of our Pacific brothers and sisters.

On this note, Zeichner (1993) identifies the following characteristics that a teacher trainee should have if they are to be effective multicultural teachers. He says they should have:

◊ A clear sense of their own ethnic and cultural identity

High expectations for student success
• The expectation that all students can succeed and that they [teachers] can help them succeed
• Commitment to achieving equity for all students and knowledge about accommodating different learning styles and abilities
• The ability to bond with students; genuine caring about young people and their welfare
• A strong multicultural knowledge base that includes both depth and breadth regarding ethnic studies, gender concerns and sensitivity to persons with special needs. (Cited in Tiedt & Tiedt 2002, p.53)

Tiedt & Tiedt (2002, pp.38-39) go further to reinforce Zeichner’s list of attitudes and skills as enabling teachers to:
1. Help each student develop a positive sense of self esteem;
2. Guide students towards a feeling of empathy towards others; and
3. Provide equitable opportunities for every student.

These key goals relate to their proposed EEE model which emphasizes esteem, empathy and equity. On the same issue of multicultural competencies, McGee Banks (2001, p.178) centers cross and multicultural competency as the focal point of ME, arguing that:

Multicultural competencies do not exist in isolation of subject-matter and pedagogical knowledge. Academic and pedagogical knowledge are required as a foundation for teachers to develop multicultural competencies. Cross-cultural teachers draw on their disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge as they craft ways to frame and link that knowledge to their students’ experiences, backgrounds and interests.

While the terms may differ, in all of these ideas about multicultural competencies, there is concurrence in the belief that the process of developing multicultural competencies is not taught, but rather is facilitated as it is a very personal process involving self-reflection and critical awareness of the self and others, as well as one’s relationships with other groups. The three core dimensions of teacher education: core beliefs and attitudes; a solid knowledge base (both epistemological & pedagogical); and, the relevant skill set are clearly apparent in these designs.

If we were to use these as a starting point, we could say that a multicultural teacher in the Pacific context is therefore a teacher who is:
1. Culturally intelligent; that is, being knowledgeable about Pacific cultures and the various sub-cultural groups within Pacific societies including culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, diverse and special needs and socio-economic background;
2. Is mindful in their observations and interpretations of situations;
3. Skilful of adapting their behavior appropriately to suit changing contexts and situations;
4. Believes in and values diversity in society and the school; and
5. Is able to devise activities and learning experiences that recognizes values and reflects that diversity.

What trainee teachers need to understand is that education has a moral obligation to both students and society, bringing to the fore the social dimension of schooling and the kinds of citizens that the schooling process may be nurturing. It is because of the need for positive intercultural and cross cultural interaction in society that teachers should be tenacious in their efforts to promote a respect for multiple perspectives and diverse communities so that they do not propagate or exacerbate existing marginalization. Nieto (2000, p139) makes a crucial comment on this:

"The dictum 'equal is not the same' is useful... It means that treating everyone in the same way will not necessarily lead to equality; rather it may end up perpetuating the inequality that already exists. Learning to affirm differences rather than deny them is what a multicultural perspective is all about."

Nieto highlights an important point here by stressing the fact that simply treating all students the same or being 'color-blind' is not an appropriate response to diversity. Instead, teachers need to be aware of the histories and conditions of the representative groups; their journeys, their beliefs, their values and general expectations of the schooling process. Teachers who do not have adequate multicultural skills and competencies would be unaware of acceptable means of interaction and may come across as being ignorant, ill-mannered or callous on one hand, or being offensive or patronizing on the other.

What this means for Pacific teacher education programmes is not only an inclusion of culturally inclusive content and pedagogy, but a multicultural approach that embraces the plurality of both indigenous cultures as well as those of other groups.

The Way forward

If ME is to be seriously considered in Pacific teacher education, a core course in Pacific Studies is essential. In this way, trainee teachers would be exposed to the historical and cultural backgrounds of PICs. This would foster a stronger knowledge base about PICs in general. Such a course should not only scrutinize indigenous groups of the Pacific, but also incorporate minority diasporic groups and cover their journeys to the region.

Critical reflection is of equal importance to the exploration of Pacific journeys, Pacific peoples and cultures and social change. This critical reflection begins with an examination and understanding of one’s own experiences and perceptions and progresses to those of members of other groups. Ultimately this engenders a deeper understanding of one’s own multiple perspectives and identities as well as those of others.

A study of Pacific societies can lead to such an understanding of cultural beliefs, values and attitudes which are fundamental to the development of a teaching philosophy that embraces multiple perspectives and ways of being, knowing and learning. Nieto (2000, p341) postulates, “Multicultural education without critique keeps cultural understanding at the romantic or exotic stage. If we are unable to transcend our own cultural experiences through reflection and critique, then we cannot hope to understand and critique that of others.”

An activity that is central to the initial phase of developing one’s own cultural literacy or intelligence would be a cultural analysis. This activity engages students in reflecting on a Koya, C.F (2009). Sustainable Living in the Pacific: Exploring the role of Multiculturalism in Teacher Education, In Rethinking Education Curricula in the Pacific: Challenges and Prospects, eds. Kabini Sanga and Konai H Thaman, He Parekereke, Wellington: Victoria University Press. pp 102 -123
A Model for the development of multicultural competencies

In this phase, students engage in activities and discussion that enables them to reflect on their own cultural experiences, values, beliefs, attitudes and knowledge. Students complete a cultural analysis. They examine their own multiple identities in terms of ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality and nationality. They also consider how their beliefs and values color their perceptions and judgments of others who may not share their beliefs.

In the second phase, students learn about and reflect on one culture other than their own. The cross-cultural analysis activity which is critical to this phase enables an in-depth comparative analysis of the knowledge frameworks, beliefs, values and skills of their own culture in relation to the selected other culture. They would consider how differences in core values, beliefs and communicative conventions could lead to conflict and how these could be minimized or addressed if conflict arises. This phase could be administered as pair work with students pairs made up of two students from different cultural or ethnic groups.

In the third phase, as in the previous phases similar activities are engaged in with students attempting to complete a multicultural analysis. This is a greater task and requires much thinking and collaborative work. Small teams of four or five may be comprised of students from various ethnic, cultural, religious and gender groups for greater diversity.

Such an approach to developing multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills would enable the translation to positive attitudes, beliefs and values about diversity and towards ME. The multicultural teacher, therefore, rather than simply expecting all students to assimilate into the eurocentric cultural paradigms and practices of the schooling process would enrich the learning experience so that each child feels that his/her cultural and personal specificities are valued and viewed as both authentic and valid to the teaching learning process. This transcends the usual discussion of tolerance of difference, and demands a more cohesive and systematic approach to the development of culturally inclusive pedagogies.

The ME approach aligns with an integrated approach that values the cultural contribution of each group and recognizes the commonality that binds all the groups together in the classroom and school. Mahadrige, who writes on social diversity in the USA, comments: “In this manner, each group can maintain identity, but still be part of the collective culture”

(1996, p248). He provides the following illustration to demonstrate his point which can be applied for our purpose.

While Mahadrige does not purport to know what constitutes the shared culture, however, in terms of ME, the shared culture may be defined as those shared values, beliefs, knowledge and skills that are critical to a cohesive shared group culture. I would argue that such a shared culture cannot be defined by neutral counterparts outside of the interaction, nor can it be implemented based on pure theoretical impressions but instead is negotiated by the groups through praxis as defined by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* of 350 BC and further explored by Brazilian theorist Paulo Freire. Freire (1993) asserts that praxis is action that is informed and based on committed interaction, reflection, experience and systematic engagement over time.

Building on this, it is a prerequisite that the trainee teacher is of the view that the best way to develop a positive, nurturing learning experience for all students is to engage in reflective practice in all aspects of the teaching learning process, including diversity in the classroom.

Conclusion

In summary, Pacific educators and teacher education institutions should begin to consider ways by which to integrate ME into their existing programmes for a number of reasons. ME has positive implications for Pacific teacher education. It is relevant in that it allows for the development of the basic competencies required by the diverse classroom. ME offers the opportunity to incorporate a more inclusive approach to curriculum development and implementation that recognizes cultural and other conditions of diversity.

Any such innovation requires political will and policy change in order for actualized curriculum reform to take place. Historically, these have been forthcoming when funding is directed by donors in specific areas of focus which invariably results in the importation of foreign consultants and eurocentric frameworks. The outcome is inevitably a costly policy document which more often than not ends up shelved so real curriculum change is not actualized in terms of schooling and projected outcomes of the objectives stipulated in these documents. In order for ME to be actualized with Pacific education, a real understanding of what ME entails as well as the implications that it has for teacher education and the teaching learning process must be encouraged through dialogue and consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Nieto (2000, p2) provides a word of caution worth noting:
To view multicultural education as “the answer” to school failure is simplistic because other important social and educational issues that affect the lives of students would be ignored.
Multicultural education does not exist in a vacuum but must be understood in its larger personal, social, historical and political context.

If ME is developed in context and tailored to meet local and regional needs in line with global trends and standards, it could offer substantial benefits to the establishment of quality education reform in teacher education. It is inclusive education and provides the cultural emphasis that Pacific educators have been calling for. As far as inclusive education goes, ME is education for all. It actively promotes the skills, knowledge and values required for living in diverse communities as articulated by the Delors Report and emphasized in the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity. ME would enable teachers to facilitate a more meaningful teaching and learning process that caters for diverse students’ learning needs and backgrounds.

Furthermore, ME could provide an opportunity for the integration of a Pacific consciousness and regional identity into education. This is something that is of significant value given the emphasis on regionalism in economic and political policy making in the Pacific today. Moreover, ME can be developed so that teachers are better able to conceptualize a personal platform or philosophy of teaching that is founded on a strong personal identity, a national identity and a regional identity before considering the significance of a global identity. ME is education for sustainable development and acknowledging diversity and working towards the promotion of positive social relations is the first step towards sustainable development of our diverse societies.

An outcome of substantial significance of an ME approach is the development of cultural, cross cultural and multicultural competencies. These skills are crucial to purposeful social interaction both inside the classroom and school as well as in community interactions.

Something which according to Hoar (2006, p2) "allows individuals to respond with respect and empathy to people of all cultures, classes, races, religions and ethnic backgrounds that recognizes, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families and communities."

Essentially, a Pacific based ME cannot be imported from abroad no matter how successful it is viewed in its country of origin. Rather the specific conditions, histories and boundaries of ME with the Pacific context needs to be given due consideration before embarking on this journey. What is certain, however, is that teacher training institutions must become more proactive in working towards their commitment towards the inclusion of both culture and multicultural issues in their programmes so that Pacific teachers of the future are adequately prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

We allow our ignorance to prevail upon us and make us think we can survive alone, alone in patches, alone in groups, alone in races, even alone in genders. - Maya Angelou

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