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Book review

Alcorn, N. (Ed.). (2010). *Oloketa tingting fo apem education long Solomon Islands: Issues in Solomon Islands Education*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER Press. ISBN 978-1-877398-91-9: 218 pages.

Until now policy makers, teacher educators, teachers and students in the Solomon Islands have been restricted to international perspectives/research to help them understand their own education context. There have been very few context-specific publications to support the members of the education profession to make sense of policy, practice and programming/curriculum. This book draws together the work of Solomon Islanders who may have originally identified as educators, but now are also emerging researchers and writers. As local people studying their communities' policies and practices, the writers are able to account for the broader social and cultural factors that shape education practice. From both an inside-out and outside-in perspective (Knapp, 2002) the authors' research contextualises historical and contemporary developments and issues in Solomon Islands education and makes connections to the international literature. Throughout the entire book it becomes clear that the lack of resources, social/cultural kastoms (customs), the speed of educational development have all contributed to a somewhat fractured education system. Each chapter contributes to making sense of some of the broader underlying issues and offers ideas about steps that will need to be taken to reform the Solomon Islands education system. This makes the book a must-have for those working in education in the Solomon Islands, be they local policy makers, teachers, education students, teacher educators, or international "aid" organisations and education "consultants".

There are three overarching sections in the book. The first explores the systemic issues that shape and impact on the provision of education in the Solomon Islands. In Chapter One, co-written with Noeline Alcorn, Derek Sikua examines the issues associated with the rapid establishment and growth of community high schools. They highlight the complexity of the process and the challenges associated with decentralisation, resourcing, policy and local community involvement, in a context where more than 90 community high schools were established in less than five years. In Chapter Two, Rose Beuka and Jane Strachan explore parent perceptions of secondary education at a time when access to post-primary schooling has increased and the employment context has changed, and there are very limited opportunities for secondary school leavers to access employment. Rose's research suggests that most parents wanted their children to be successful academically, so as to position them for careers that pay well and offer financial security. In Chapter Three, Patricia Rodie



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investigates the experiences of beginning teachers and identifies that a lack of resource materials and formal support and guidance limit opportunities for further development. Her discussion highlights some important suggestions for ways to improve the professional learning opportunities for beginning teachers during their initial teacher education and at the beginning of their teaching careers.

The focus then shifts in Section Two, as three authors examine issues of educational leadership. In Chapters Four and Five, Donald Malasa and Colin Ruqebatu respectively report on research associated with school leadership. Their separate research projects highlight the limited training and preparation school principals have for the requirements of their roles. They raise questions about principals' understandings of educational leadership, and the challenges of trying to be a leader when the context dictates that much of the time principals are forced to be managers. Shalom Akao's chapter, Chapter Six, on women educational leaders was particularly stimulating. I particularly appreciated how she explicitly raised concerns about gender inequities prevalent in Solomon Islands communities. Her chapter makes sustainable inroads to bringing gender politics to the fore as she identifies the specific social barriers facing women as educational leaders and advocates for change, while noting the challenges associated with making a difference.

The final section focuses on wider curriculum issues. In leading this section, Suzanne Maezama (Chapter Seven) explores "Really Useful Knowledge" and challenges the reader to consider what constitutes a context-specific curriculum. Drawing on policy and curriculum developments, and insights from those in the education sector, Suzanne makes a strong case for developing coherent and connected curriculum, across all levels of education, that reflects international knowledges, without marginalising local knowledge or the cultural context. In Chapter Eight, David Sade describes the process, challenges and outcomes of a professional development programme associated with technology education. This research emphasises how positively teachers responded to the opportunity to engage in professional learning, and how their shifts in understandings about what constitutes technology education have been beneficial for teachers and their students. Solomon Vaji Pita's chapter, Chapter Nine, emphasises the disparity in access and use of ICT by teachers in Solomon Islands schools. His data, gathered in Honiara, demonstrates the difficulties teachers have in accessing ICT tools (computers, digital cameras, the Internet), and the limited opportunities they have to develop their own knowledge, and therefore support the advancement of student understanding. In the final chapter, Janine Simi (with Noeline Alcorn) explores teacher educators' and their students' understandings of and attitudes towards inclusive education. In doing so, she illustrates an ignorance of the special and inclusive education that is reflective of societal dismissiveness. Janine makes a strong case for changes to educational policy and practices in initial teacher education, to ensure that all students in the Solomon Islands have opportunities to engage in education.

The book is an easy, enjoyable and enlightening read. While at times the challenges of academic writing are apparent, this does not detract from the main points presented in each chapter. For me, I only wish it had been available before I first visited the Solomon Islands in the Partnership initiative between the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and the University of Waikato. Reading this book would have

prepared me to understand the needs and challenges facing those who work in education settings in the Solomon Islands.

The value in the book lies in the way the voices of Solomon Islanders are realised, and that the writers, as educational leaders, model for their community and colleagues the importance of evidence-informed and reflective practice. Noeline Alcorn is to be commended on her ability to support emerging academics to publish, and on developing a book that provides a broad and insightful account of education policy, leadership, curriculum and practices in the Solomon Islands.

Reference

Knapp, M. (2002). *Understanding how policy meets practice: Two takes on local response to a state reform initiative*. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

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