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Reconceptualising inclusive education in the Pacific

Ann Cheryl Armstrong\textsuperscript{a}, Seu’ula Johansson-Fuab\textsuperscript{b} and Derrick Armstrong\textsuperscript{c}

\textsuperscript{a}School of Education, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji; \textsuperscript{b}Institute of Education, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji; \textsuperscript{c}Research Office, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji

\textbf{ABSTRACT}

The Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018–2030 proposes an ambitious agenda for a transformative and sustainable educational intervention across 15 countries. This paper discusses an approach to inclusive education in the countries of the Pacific islands as they begin to engage with this educational framework. We argue that inclusive education has been heavily influenced by ideas from outside the Pacific. Pacific cultural understandings of community relationships and responsibilities in particular are often overshadowed by imported ideas from outside the region. The influence of ‘outsider’ perspectives and practices reflect continuing colonial domination, weakening local capacity-building within teacher education institutions in the region. The Pacific Island countries (PICs) are highly dependent on donor partners and this dependency is frequently informed by deficit views. The idea of inclusive education begs the question of ‘Inclusion into what?’ The dominance of Western ideas may ignore the relational context of Pacific cultures, reinforcing ideas of cultural deficit. This paper reviews inclusive education in the Pacific within the context of policy borrowing and cultural tensions between Pacific and Western frameworks. It also considers the experience of teacher educators working within an institutional context that itself is heavily influenced by imported structures and ideas.

\textbf{KEYWORDS}

Inclusive education; Pacific; indigenous culture; colonial; teacher education; relationality; funding

\textbf{Ambition and reform: strategies for education in the Pacific}

In 2018, the Education Ministers of 15 Pacific Island Countries (PICs), endorsed a new regional education framework: the ‘\textit{Pacific Regional Education Framework: Moving Towards Education 2030}’ (PacREF – PIFS 2018). This framework prioritised four policy areas: Quality and Relevance, Learning Pathways, Student Outcomes and Well-being, and, Teacher Professionalism. The PacREF is an ambitious reform programme designed to address the future educational needs of Pacific societies, based upon a commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4 on quality, inclusive education and lifelong learning for all (United Nations 2015).

A core element of the PacREF is the linked Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Framework (PRIEF – PIFS et al 2019) which has been strongly influenced by recent thinking...
in countries of the north about the human rights of disabled people (Forlin et al. 2015; Sharma, Loreman, and Macanawai 2015). This emanates from concerns about mechanised teaching methods, an under-skilled teaching force, and inflexible forms of assessment that are believed to characterise Pacific schools. However, the framework makes assumptions that need to be examined through a more critical lens. The hangover from colonial relationships still frame the dominant educational and development discourses of the region, first, through the role of funding agencies based in the developed-world; and second, from policy-borrowing from those countries. The experiences of Pacific educators have largely been ignored within the region in the implementation of these external frameworks.

Methodology

We draw upon Mignolo’s (2011, 162), critical framework for understanding the disconnects between the role of education in nation-building in post-colonial societies and the experiences of educators in those societies. Documentary analysis has been used to critically analyse key Pacific and international documents. This analysis focuses on education reform in the Pacific region and on commonalities and differences across countries. These are juxtaposed with the writings of leading Pacific academics who explore issues of relationality and Oceanic space in the culture and traditions of PICs. Furthermore, we draw on our own experience of teacher education within the PICs to illustrate and critique the meaning and practice of inclusive education in the Pacific.

Contextualising educational reform

In 2018, the PICs launched the PacREF aimed at addressing persistent underachievement within national education systems. This initiative is to be funded by the Global Partnership in Education (GPE) under the management of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Under this strategy sits the Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Framework (PRIEF), which is focused on the education of learners with disabilities and others at risk of exclusion from education. Large numbers of Pacific Island children are estimated to be outside of formal education (PIFS 2009). Hence, participation opportunities for those with diverse learning needs have been identified as key to the overall education strategy for the region.

Inclusive education: the concept and the challenges

The term ‘inclusive education’ has been seen as embracing a more holistic approach to supporting those with a diverse range of learning needs (United Nations 2015). These include indigenous children, girls, those living in rural and remote communities, child workers, street children, ethnic minorities and others who are potentially at risk of exclusion. Drawing heavily on UN CRPD Article 24 (United Nations 2006) the Pacific Disability Forum defines inclusive education as:

… the means by which the rights of children and youth with disabilities to education are upheld at all levels within the general education system, on an equal basis with others in
Yet, this approach to inclusive education has had limited impact on schools and education systems in Pacific island countries. It has been argued that this is because of a lack of ownership of such initiatives (Sharma, Loreman, and Macanawai 2015). Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou (2010) and Le Fanu (2013) both argue that inclusive education reform has been driven by international policies and foreign aid, not by local initiatives. A study in Botswana, suggests that teachers often feel ill-equipped, especially if there is a paucity of support from their leaders for quality inclusive education, resulting in many teachers feeling apprehensive of working with students with disabilities and other diverse learning needs and demonstrating negative behaviours towards these children (Chhabra, Srivastava, and Srivastava 2010). Such issues can only be resolved by the provision of quality well-structured teacher preparedness through in-service and pre-service teacher education programmes which have strong elements of inclusive education. These must be aligned to quality supervision and mentoring to ensure that the intervention is sustainable and positive teaching cultures are developed and maintained. Community awareness programmes, as suggested by the PDF (Pacific Disability Forum), USP (University of the South Pacific), PIFS (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat) and Monash University (2019), that prepare the school community for the inclusion of students with diverse learning needs is key to the success of any inclusive framework. Yet, access to schools for physically disabled children as well as access to: adequate schooling opportunities, resources, inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, specialist facilities and expertise continue to be challenges in PICs where generally there are separate systems of mainstream and special education (PDF (Pacific Disability Forum), USP (University of the South Pacific), PIFS (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat) and Monash University 2019).

The Pacific is not a homogenous space. There are many countries with different cultures and languages and therefore concepts like inclusive education need to be revisited, revised, and reinterpreted within the Pacific context and not just in respect of international declarations and policies (Miles, Lene, and Merumeru 2014). This requires regional engagement and collaboration that is respectful, reflecting ‘the Pacific way’. Also, there is a great need for the data used in monitoring and evaluation to be valid and reliable if it is to inform any progress towards equitable and inclusive education systems (Sharma et al. 2018). Very importantly, the Pacific Indicators for Disability-Inclusive Education (Pacific-INDIE) highlighted the importance of disability support. This approach was guided by three key principles: collaboration; recognition of the importance of systems-level intervention; and acceptance of the key concept of the disability movement internationally, namely, ‘nothing about us without us’. It has been argued that a key strength of successful change programmes has been recognition of the importance of locals in making decisions about disability support needs in education (Sharma et al. 2018).

**Weaving Pacific-ness into the frameworks**

Through the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative (RPEI), Pacific educators have mounted a significant challenge to the dominance of outside expertise and the lack of
visionary leadership and ownership of reforms from within the Pacific (Afamasaga and Esera 2005; Heine and Chutaro 2005; Niroa 2005; Sanga 2005; Taufe’ulungaki 2014; Otunuku et al. 2014; Toumu’a, Sanga, and Johansson-Fua 2016). Johansson-Fua (2014) argues that the failure to use research findings in Pacific schools has been a key factor explaining the lack of involvement of Pacific teachers, curriculum writers, and teacher educators in the leadership of reform processes. She argues that Pacific-based tools such as the ‘talanoa’ are necessary in order to identify authentic data and to encourage participation of practitioners. Improving an educational system requires more than planners; it also requires capable, strategic and visionary leaders who can transform policies, initiatives and frameworks into practical activities that will improve education systems as a whole and subsequently improve students’ learning. The failure of development programmes so often lies in an approach largely driven by outside agencies who give little attention to building the relationships and partnerships within countries that allow for conversations that would support learning and improvement of the national systems of education. For example, two systems, the ‘Wansolwara’ and the ‘Fono’, which are reflective of regionalism and the cultures of the Pacific, have been developed by Pacific educators to guide the development and implementation of the PacREF. Yet, funding agencies have difficulty in understanding this and constantly emphasise a focus on priorities derived from educational experience in developed countries. None the less, the Wansolwara Platform, which speaks to dialogic and relational spaces, has been developed to support the work of the PacREF. This platform promotes indigenous dialogue through ‘talanoa’, ‘tok stori’, ‘bwebwenato’ and other forms of traditional Pacific exchanges of ideas through which local communities arrive at tangible solutions through consensus. The Wansolwara is a relational space for continual, life-long learning that promotes tauhi va – the establishment, maintenance and sometimes the mending of relationships. Being in such a relational space requires humility, integrity, and being in a constant state of learning.

The PacREF Implementing Agencies, which include the University of the South Pacific, have placed great emphasis on the Pacific idea of ‘relationality’. For example, the ‘Fono’, which has already been included in the Wansolwara Platform, affirms an open space for dialogue, relationship and cooperation. It is situated within the wider governance structure of the PacREF and is the gathering of partners where they reflect on, critique, rethink and plan the various activities and processes that are being utilised to deliver and report on the PacREF. The Fono has a dual location and function at regional and national levels and provides a venue for critical dialogue on the state of regional cooperation, and proposes tangible actions to further strengthen regional cooperation and coherent national action.

This model has already led to tensions with the funding agency. While the groups involved in implementation have asked for a regional approach to implementation, the representatives of the funding agency (GPE and ADB) have difficulties accommodating this model within their own structures and processes. The ADB procurement policy assumes that work on the programme will be contracted out to consultants through open international competition; a system that privileges outsiders rather than supporting local capacity building.

The consequences of these tensions are first that development aid serves as a tool for creating continuing dependency and disabling local knowledge, innovation and
expertise, and second, the influence of Western ways of knowing and doing create institutional cultures within teacher education in developing countries that work against the building of empowered capacity amongst teachers. Even so-called progressive or universal notions like ‘human rights’ based inclusive education can be problematic when imported uncritically from outside. The western idea of human rights which is based upon the European Enlightenment experience may have been liberating and now normalised within Europe but in the Pacific it implies a fundamental separation between the self and the other which many would consider counter to Pacific cultures which emphasise whole of life inter-relationality. The imposition of a human rights model of inclusion on traditional societies may represent those societies and cultures as deficient. Hence, the need to conceptualise alternative models of inclusivity which relate to traditional cultures if they are to add value in empowering educational transformations. For the PACREF and PRIEF, this holds particular challenges where development funders implicitly hold to models of inclusion and outcome measures that are embedded in cultural histories external to the Pacific.

Coloniality, culture and power

The role of development aid has been widely critiqued as creating dependency-based economic relationships between governments and agencies of the global North on the one hand and the recipient countries of the global South (Puamau 2007). It has also been critiqued for enforcing colonial ideas and knowledge frames on Indigenous societies. Mignolo (2011) has argued that European Enlightenment philosophy created the idea that:

not only was knowledge universal, but the knower was equally a universally endowed epistemetic subject who embodied the universality of sensing and experiencing – hence, a subject that was beyond the racial and patriarchal hierarchies (Mignolo 2011, 187).

As the PICs embark on designing a new phase of Educational transformation aimed at improving opportunities and outcomes across the region, it may be useful to reflect on the learning from past attempts at education reform and also to consider this process through the lens of the four interrogative questions that Mignolo’s decolonial perspective has posed. According to Mignolo (2011) colonialism persists through the nation-building processes in post-colonial societies. Traditional societies are being re-colonised through the imposition of external policy and development frameworks that seek to bring them into the fold of neoliberal modernity and through the internalisation of these processes within newly formed post-colonial states. He argues that a decolonial perspective must ask four critical questions:

(1) Who is the knowing subject?
(2) What kind of knowledge/understanding is being generated and why?
(3) Who is benefiting from particular knowledge or understanding?
(4) What institutions are supporting particular ways of knowing and understanding?

In the following section we draw upon this framework as an analytical tool to question the practice of inclusivity in Pacific education.
Who is the knowing subject?

Another way of asking this question would be to ask ‘Who is to be included in what?’ In attempting to move away from deficit notions of ‘special needs’, modern representations of ‘inclusion’ have come to be cast in terms of ‘human rights’ (UNESCO 1994; United Nations 2006). The Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education (UNESCO 1994) affirmed:

the right to education of every individual, as enshrined in the 1948 Universal declaration of Human Rights, and renewing the pledge made by the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All to ensure that right for all regardless of individual differences.

Although the notion of inclusion as a human right is often presented as a universal principle derived from European Enlightenment philosophy, it is important to reflect on the history of this idea together and the particular social interests that were linked to it. In eighteenth century Europe and North America, ‘the Rights of Man’ sloganised the political struggles of the propertied classes against the European landowning aristocracy. The human rights discourse of the founding fathers of America did not include rights for their slaves but rather the right of the propertied classes to ownership of their slaves (Losurdo 2014). Immanuel Kant, the great philosopher of the European Enlightenment maintained that ‘African Negros have received from nature nothing but the most insignificant endowments’ (as quoted in Antenor Firmin 2002, 325). The major problem with the moral doctrine of human rights is that it doesn’t offer any explanation or understanding about why things are the way they are and therefore it provides no insight into the structures and mechanisms through which change can be brought about. At the heart of the idea of human rights argument as the basis for inclusive education is a very obvious question; namely, ‘Inclusion into what, or into whose world?’ In Mignolo’s words, ‘who speaks for the “human” in human rights’ (2011, 239). The idea of ‘inclusion’, as it is used in educational policy and practice, very often entails a conceptual ‘othering’ of those who are excluded. Normality is represented as the status quo and inclusion is focused on opening access to that normality for those which it currently excludes. What is defined as ‘normality’ remains unchanged. The positionality of the hegemonic norm privileges the space of the dominant colonial perspective, the perspective of the global North.

What kind of knowledge/understanding is being generated and why?

In European philosophy the self is positioned in opposition to the other, yet Mignolo argues (2011, 228) in indigenous cultures this separation often cannot be found. The word ‘Fonua’ in Tongan and ‘Vanua’ in Fijian, both refer to the land and to the people. Positionality is based on relationships, so one’s positionality is determined by the relationship to others; that is, by how one is viewed by others, not by a code of ‘rights’. Moreover, the idea of ‘human rights’ does not traditionally have an equivalent in these languages. The hierarchal relationships within traditional Tongan society for example place relationships between different social groups and the obligations and responsibilities that follow from these at the centre of a coherent or ‘inclusive’ society (Taumoefolau 2019). Tongan people, a product of centuries of monarchy and social
hierarchy, are never born free or equal, and Tongan has no word for ‘rights’ as in ‘to have rights’, nor a conventional way of saying that one has a voice in something. It is true that the Tongan language has in recent times adopted words such as totonu (rights), totonu ‘a e tangatā (the rights of humans) and ‘i ai honau le’o (they have a voice), but these have developed as literal translations of the English expressions embedded in the experiences of a new cosmopolitan elite distinct from the traditional rural Tongan human rights conflict with cultural ‘rights’, or the cultural roles, of Pacific peoples (Taumoefolau 2019).

This argument illustrates the difference between particular traditional understandings and those grounded in European Enlightenment philosophy. It also illustrates the power of colonial relationships that normalise one worldview over another. Moreover, it suggests how within traditional societies the relationship between colonial and traditional concepts come into conflict. These conflicts can be articulated in ways that empower or disempower traditional views. For example, Taumoefolau (2019) points to Tonga’s non-ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW). She argues,

The knowledge gulf between the two camps is huge, resulting in traditionalists not fully appreciating Western-derived concepts like human rights, which go beyond Tongan society to the universal human society. When the government announced its intention to have CEDAW ratified, more than 10,000 people petitioned the king that it was contrary to Tongan culture and religion. The king stopped the ratification.

On the other hand, this rejection of the CEDAW (uncomfortable as this may be to Westernised liberals) reflected resistance to the attempt to impose Eurocentric positionality on Tongan traditional society.

Educational interventions, and particularly those that draw upon knowledge and experience from outside, must recognise the societal context of learning. Engagement with new ideas is a necessary part of learning but this learning must also recognise and respect the context of learners’ own experiences. Respectful learning does not mean understanding context as an aid to changing traditional ways of thinking to comply with the norms of external cultures and ideologies. It is rather concerned with enabling learners’ in their own learning journey.

It is important to understand that Pacific learners are not a homogeneous group. They belong to a rich variety of different cultures, languages and possess a multiplicity of experiences. There cannot be one universal approach to improving outcomes for Pacific learners. Teachers and programmes need to be flexible enough to address the range of students’ learning needs in a manner that makes the learning meaningful to them.

Who is benefiting from particular knowledge or understanding?

In the context of colonial relationships, the idea of human rights and inclusion may serve to normalise a binary separation. Thus, the question, ‘inclusion into what?’ problematises the idea of a universal self in relation to which other cultures are deficient or backward. Hence, the need to conceptualise alternative models of inclusivity as a basis for empowering educational transformations. Particular challenges occur where development agencies hold to implicit models of inclusion and indictors of successful outcomes.
Similarly, such challenges are reflected where outside agencies articulate a set of inclusive practices modelled on the hegemonic utilisation of what it is to be normal and what it is to be included. This question about the benefits of particular knowledge and understanding is pertinent at different levels: the classroom; the community; at the national level; regionally; as well as internationally in relation to donor agencies.

Pacific Islanders are deeply relational people, their identity and being are defined from the collective. Thaman (2008, 464) describes the ‘importance of vaa as the basis for Tongan social interaction’ and this ‘is reflected in the high regard people place on rules governing different kinds of interpersonal relationships and social interaction’. She further describes how ‘vaa is used to denote interpersonal relationships’ and how in these relationships behavioural expectations and social norms are expected to be played out in the relationship. As such, the maintenance of the vaa is also contextual, depending on the people involved (families, individuals, social groups) and the place (home, village, formal social event, work place etc.). Keeping relationships, or tauhi vaha’a, is important to maintain harmony and peace between different people. Being relational, requires knowledge of the social context and networks between people that maintain good relationships. Young Tongans are socialised early into this ethical system with identities also formed by connection to the land. Therefore, conversations about ‘inclusivity’ should be framed by a relational perspective (connection to people) and in accordance to context (time and place/land). Johansson-Fua (2016), drawing on Epeli Hau’ofa’s call for an alternative view of the Pacific Islands which provided a path to reimagine ‘development’, has proposed a metaphorical Motutapu – a relational space for educational researchers to co-explore new and more authentic dialogue and conscious action for educational development in Oceania.

An appreciation of relationality, enables interrogation of external models and approaches to ‘inclusion’ and inclusive education and to a deeper notion of Pacific values, beliefs, and philosophies. An inclusive framework for educational development needs to research, understand and engage with these cultural beliefs and experiences from a Pacific perspective. For example, more needs to be understood about how communities, villages, churches and parents view children with disabilities and what they hope school will do for them. Without such engagement, the idea of inclusive schooling is shallow. The experience of the Pacific must be drawn on to provide evidence from classrooms, schools, and from community experiences to indicate how future practice might most usefully be developed.

What institutions are supporting particular ways of knowing and understanding?

To be effective in improving educational outcomes, interventions need to do more than replicate what has been successful in someone else’s country or culture. Aid-based projects often fail to recognise this and the role of external consultant-facilitators can conflate and entrench the idea of ‘best practice’ with ‘western’ models. Too often intervention programmes fail because they do not recognise that learners don’t fit into pre-fabricated boxes. Learners are complex human beings, and they need to be treated in ways that recognise their experience, their relationships, and their ways of understanding and relating to the environment (social, emotional, spiritual and physical). The failure of
education so often lies in the inflexibility of the relationship between teacher and learner and the inability of the former to form significant relationships with the latter. However, the context of those relationships is equally significant. Where the teacher lacks the skills to frame classroom interactions within a culturally empathetic context, learning is unlikely to take place (Hau’ofa 1993; Crossley 2010; Sanga and Reynolds 2018).

We are not arguing that traditional societies are naturally ‘inclusive’ because they have certain types of cultural practices. We are not arguing that Pacific societies are more or less inclusive than those in the ‘developed’ North. However, we do maintain that culture and the nature of relationships formed through culture, is highly relevant to the ways in which educational practice takes place, and therefore for how educational outcomes are both understood and achieved (Crossley 2010). Likewise, our argument does not suggest that cross-cultural engagements cannot lead to educational improvement. The important question is that of how the process of cross-cultural engagement takes place. Starting from the perspective of ‘deficit’, or intervening with outside models to address ‘failure’, is itself a means of creating failure – failure of the intervention, and continuing failures to achieve improvements in learning outcomes. The privileging of interventions that are unrelated to the local context achieves little other than colonial re-imposition. The colonial project of inclusion provides no opportunity for culturally located thinking about inclusivity to flourish. Consequently, teachers are also identified as deficient within a deficit system.

Challenges for teacher educators

The implications of colonial models of inclusivity are pervasive within policy interventions and the practices of teacher education; they are internalised into both the curriculum and the thinking of teacher educators. Although much is known about successful strategies for teaching children with severe cognitive and physical disabilities there is a paucity of research in the Pacific into the relationship between individual interventions and community expectations and norms. In the absence of such understanding and the respectful engagement that should follow, the imposition of externally determined values and ‘best practice’ is likely to lead not only to failure of any intervention but also increase hostility and distrust. It is important to understand the development of cultural and social perspectives within traditional societies. This provides a starting point for reflection and dialogue the multiple dimensions of interventions: on the one hand, re-colonisation through the enforced introduction of ‘superior’ ideas and approaches; and, on the other hand, a process of genuine change and development within the culture through a non-hegemonic cross-cultural sharing and engagement with a plurality of ideas and perspectives, without debasing and disempowering Indigenous Communities. This emphasises the problem with ‘development’-led interventions that implicitly assume that the cultures of funding recipients, along with the individual recipients of interventions are in deficit, always a few steps behind and looking to learn from the ideas of others in ‘more developed’ spaces, constantly comparing and being compared negatively with those who provide the aid assistance.

There needs to be more interrogation of the models that are propose; problematising the role and nature of inclusion within particular contexts, and critiquing the underpinning assumptions of policy borrowing. The economic disparities between western
countries where many of these models originate, and developing countries which are presented with models for implementation also need to be considered. The Pacific countries are spread over great distances with many remote communities. Preparing teachers with the skills to be good teachers of all children becomes far more important than equipping teachers with highly specialist skills. Teachers need the skills to provide quality education regardless of whom is sitting in front of them. They require a repertoire of skills that can be used across all classrooms. Thus, it can be argued, inclusive education is to be understood as high quality education for all learners. The problem, however, goes beyond the interventions themselves.

Teacher education in the Pacific is heavily influenced by external models of teacher preparation. These models are not simply imposed from the outside but are also internalised in the institutional structures and practices of teacher education in the Pacific. Spivak (1988) discusses the concept of ‘Epistemic Violence’ by which the colonial subject is constituted as ‘other’. Subjugated knowledge, in this case indigenous ways of knowing, are characterised as being ‘unscientific’, or ‘less significant’. Knowledge from the colonising societies of the ‘West’ assumes an epistemological absolutism which gives them intellectual privilege in the newly formed institutions of colonial systems. The processes through which knowledge systems are institutionalised in the structures of colonial societies is fundamentally an affirmation of colonial power, not only over indigenous knowledge but also over indigenous societies.

This plays out in a number of ways in Pacific teacher education with particular implications for thinking about ‘inclusion’. First, both the organisational structures of tertiary education and the curriculum of teacher education are significantly derived from Western models. As institutions of learning Pacific universities reflect a universalised idea of what constitutes universities and colleges. Moreover, the more recent dimensions of neoliberal forms of institutional and curricula assessment and evaluation permeate teacher education. Second, the curriculum of teacher education in the Pacific is largely based on similar Western models. There are few concessions to localised knowledge and experience. The driving force for reform of teacher education in the region is focused on adopting so-called ‘international standards’ and ‘best practice’. For those working in teacher education, as in other areas of higher education, institutional cultures are largely imported and adopted rather than indigenous.

Sharma et al. (2018) identified 5 major issues that need to be addressed in order to successfully implement inclusive education within the Pacific region: Reducing gaps between policy and practice; Authentic engagement of key Pacific stakeholders within the countries; Teacher preparedness and adequate resourcing; Addressing stigma and attitudinal barriers; and, Authentic engagement of key Pacific stakeholders within the countries. We would like to add two additional issues, the lack of inclusion of Indigenous frameworks for understanding and supporting inclusion in education and the resistance towards the use of Indigenous methodologies which have served Pacific Islands for a long time. Some of these are being addressed by the PacREF. However, the differing national contexts have great significance for the implementation of regional strategy. Most of the countries of the Pacific have inclusive education policies (PIFS 2009, 2016) and will provide support through the implementation of the PacREF based on ‘their own national policies on inclusive education.’
The foci of these inclusive education policies vary, based on such factors as the resources available and the funding agency that supported the development of each policy. Hence it is common for policy in the Pacific to be based on western donor policies which often have no cultural relevance to the local contexts. This can lead to a mismatch between the needs, ideals and vision within countries and the priorities and/or ideologies of donor countries and agencies (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2011; Tomlinson 2017). Phillips (2015) and McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy (2013) have argued that unless the local context is acknowledged and represented through policy, then implementation of that ‘borrowed’ policy has limited chance of success due to misalignment and a tension between the two cultures. Sharma et al. (2018) similarly argued that:

A policy largely influenced by Western countries and mandated by international organisations such as UNESCO and UNICEF is unlikely to be implemented as many of the ideas and concepts are too distant from the realities of the Pacific. It may mean that policy designers work closely with the Pacific stakeholders to develop culturally relevant and sensitive policies.

A key learning here for Inclusive education strategy is the need for continuing critical engagement with national education policies through an iterative process in which local contexts, needs and priorities are centred. Through such a process, existing policies may be revised on the basis of local learning, along with action planning and codesign with key country stake-holders. Several Pacific authors have recognised that if schools in the Pacific are to become truly inclusive they need to change the manner in which learning and teaching takes place for all children (Le Fanu 2013; McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy 2013). There is an urgent need for inclusive education thinking and practice to be informed by indigenous Pacific Island perspectives, including the design of culturally sensitive inclusive education approaches.

**Conclusion**

In this paper we have examined not only the PacREF and the instruments developed to contextual educational governance within the Pacific but also reviewed some of the broader background and contextual issues that impact upon educational outcomes in the Pacific region and how these are understood, represented and addressed from different standpoints. We have given particular focus to inclusive education and its significance in the context of a Pacific educational strategy and have argued that by adopting a uniquely Pacific approach, the opportunities for rethinking the meaning and role of inclusive education within the region presents an exciting opportunity but it is an opportunity that none the less, continues to encounter some of the dubious benefits and problems of policy-borrowing along with the influence of outside agencies and their western oriented agendas.

As previously stated, our analysis has drawn on four questions posed by Mignolo (2011) which we have argued provide a framework for understanding and evaluating the colonial relationships and ideologies that may underlie development interventions.

We have used those questions to critique the role and agendas of outside agencies and funders in the development field but also, we argue, should inform self-reflection on the development of policies and interventions from within countries.
The philosophy of Inclusive Education has been heavily influenced by western notions of the autonomy of the individual subject. However, in the traditional societies of the Pacific ideas and practices embedded in relationality are of far more significance. To be meaningful in Pacific societies, educational interventions for inclusion must connect with this cultural context. We have argued that for this reason a regional inclusive education framework for the Pacific has to be a framework that decolonises the knowledge and institutional forms that have created disadvantage and alienation within Pacific education systems. Inclusive education for the Pacific must not only beyond the deficit conceptual model of ‘special education’, but must also recognise the limitations of a ‘human rights’ conceptualisation of inclusion.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors
Ann Cheryl Armstrong is an Associate Professor in Inclusive Education and the Associate Dean, Research and International at the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education at the University of the South Pacific. Prior to this she worked at the University of Sheffield, the University of Sydney and the University of Western Sydney. Over the past 21 years, Ann Cheryl has worked in several countries across the world and has contributed to the transformation of many education programmes and systems. She has published widely on inclusive education, professional learning in education and education in developing countries. <anncheryl.armstrong@usp.ac.fj>

Dr. Seu’ula Johansson-Fua is the Director of the Institute of Education at the University of the South Pacific. She has worked in the Pacific region for 15 years as an academic practitioner working with national teacher education institutions and national ministries of education. Seu’ula’s research interest are in educational leadership, educational planning and systems improvement in small island states.

Professor Derrick Armstrong is the former Deputy Vice Chancellor Research, Innovation & International at the University of the South Pacific. He has held academic positions in the UK at Lancaster University and later at Sheffield University (where he was the Inaugural Director of the Centre for Childhood and Youth). Prof. Armstrong was appointed as Dean of the Faculty of Education & Social Work at the University of Sydney in 2005 and subsequently as Deputy Provost and Pro-Vice Chancellor Teaching & Learning and then Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Registrar. He joined USP in 2015. Over his career he has authored 9 books and over 100 academic articles.

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