

A reflection on ‘being’ ‘Fijian’ and ‘belonging’ to Fiji: Conceptualizing a value-theory approach to Citizenship Education

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Abstract

Education in the 21st century is marked by the vast influence of globalization and the drive for international comparability. In Fiji, as in the rest of the Pacific, this is no different. Education systems in the Pacific islands are characteristically informed and influenced by external push and pull factors which are reflective of colonial legacies, as well as current donor dependency and the agendas that these dictate. This educational reality may be seen as a crisis of relevance that has been well documented by Pacific scholars. This paper presents the argument that the issue of what it means to ‘be’ Fijian and to ‘belong’ to Fiji is a wider socio-cultural/historical debate that has not been adequately dialogued. This dialogue is critical if citizenship education is intended to contribute to participatory citizenship and towards conscientization of national identity for social cohesion. It is further argued that a holistic curriculum package would enable students to learn through problem-solving the ability to bring about change in their own lives and in their communities.

Introduction

*Come to Niusila, he said.
This island will bring you no happiness
You will always be on the fringe looking in
You’re never going to be Fijian enough
No matter how much you do for this country.
I pretend my battery is dead
And hang up
This is my home*

*My place of beginning and becoming
The land where my umbilical cord has been planted
Beneath a young coconut tree
That promises to fruit*

*While
My feet like roots
Have grown into this soil
My hands reach for something intangible*

Excerpt from 'Niusila' (Koya 2008)

Global efforts to promote the teaching and learning of citizenship are guided by predetermined goals of the perceived ideal society and citizen behavior. These efforts share common goals of developing an understanding of what citizenship means in an effort to encourage active participation within the nation-state, and also emphasize global citizenship.

Educational theory provides a link between the works of John Dewey and Paulo Freire and our understanding of citizenship education (CE). Dewey's writings explore democratic communities; social service; reflective enquiry, and education for social transformation (Saltmarsh, 1996, p1). This view assumes that every individual has a responsibility to play in social transformation and development.

The Fiji Citizenship Education (CE) program was initiated as part of the Fiji Education Sector Reform Project (FESP). FESP, resulting from an agreement between the Governments of Fiji and Australia, spanned over the 2003 – 2008 period and focused on the development of a National Curriculum Framework (NCF) adapted from the Western Australian outcomes-based education (OBE) model (Koya 2008, p31). The NCF advocates a process approach, shifting emphasis from teaching to learning and learning outcomes.

OBE also emphasizes the need for articulate and competent teachers who are able to effectively engage students in higher order thinking (McNeir 2003, cited in Koya

2008, p.32). CE has emerged in this context of OBE, emphasizing on the one hand the broad umbrella aim of life-long learning, and, on the other, prioritizing measureable outcomes. After much investment and publicity, the NCF has never been fully implemented in Fiji, and is currently shelved for further discussion. Despite this, the OBE approach is currently adhered to, as is the Assessment for Learning (AfL) which has seen the reduction of three national examinations and the introduction of Class Based Assessments.

This article explores the value and contribution of CE to the development of active and participatory societal engagement from the standpoint of the Fiji Islander, premised on the beliefs that,

- CE *in context* should be conceived as about 'being' and 'belonging' to Fiji
- The current 'imported' form of CE ill-represents Fijian Society;
- The value of CE has yet to be explored intellectually and socially within the wider community.

Framing Citizenship Education

The Delors' Report, *Learning the Treasure Within* (1997), operates as a global framework for CE. The significance of the report to global discourse on Education in

the 21st Century is well known. The report provides a useful framework from which to develop a contextual framework for CE where the first two pillars, *learning to know* and *learning to do*, can be seen as the primary concerns of formal education in their relation to knowledge acquisition and the acquisition of skills. The remaining two pillars are reflective of a socially conscious movement in education beyond the traditional technical approach to schooling. These pillars – *learning to live together* and *learning to be* – are cognizant of the CE discourse.

CE Philosophy can be described as the search for purpose and process. CE should be viewed as a content area for inclusion in the formal school curriculum that has educational value as either a mainstreamed subject area or as an integrated across-the-curriculum content opportunity. As a starting point, Kerr (1999) provides a useful definition:

Citizenship or civics education is construed broadly to encompass the preparation of young people for their roles and responsibilities as citizens and, in particular, the role of education (through schooling, teaching and learning) in that preparatory process. (p.4)

A contested term, Citizenship presents numerous definitions for CE development and it may be useful to consider the notion of ‘active citizenship’. The GHK (2007) in collaboration with European Commission, and the Centre for Research on Life-long Learning in the UK, writes; “...it is clear that active citizenship is not only about civil rights and democracy” (p.24). In a study of fifty-seven examples of good practice and ten case studies in the European Union (EU) - covering formal, non-formal and informal education, and initiatives focusing on diverse groups including children, youth, women and girls, adults, the elderly and mixed groups - they found:

Actors emphasize the importance for Active Citizenship Education to focus on socio-cultural issues, including integration for newcomers and ethnic minorities, and multiculturalism in addition, active citizenship should be empowering, as this is the first step to giving people voice, and the “courage” to stand up for themselves and the group that they represent. (GHK, 2007: 24)

Citizenship Education in the 21st Century Pacific: Agendas and Tensions

The concept of teaching and learning about citizenship is an example of the influence of global agendas in Education. Tuinamuana (2002) explains how these agendas influence the way that education is defined, developed and perceived:

The definition of educational agendas by international agencies such as the World Bank and UNESCO has extended from a direct influence on policy formulation to the permeation of dominant global discourses on education that will affect perceptions about what education is for, and the best way to effect these aims. This permeation extends beyond education to society in understandings about social development and growth. (p.4)

In the Pacific, the drive for CE is a direct result of global influences towards the internationalization of education. As asserted by Thaman (2004),

...there is now, in our region a push towards civic and human rights education, currently under the banner of citizenship education... largely due to direct and indirect pressure from international development agencies ... involved in various forms of reforms and restructuring aimed at ensuring that Pacific governments and people become good citizens by embracing the values of democracy, freedom, human rights, good governance and so forth. (2004, p.3)

Pacific education is reflective of the globalizing effect of educational reform in the context of comparability and perceived value of educational outcomes. Thaman (2004) presents an overview of the general notion of citizenship and the Pacific Nation by Pacific Islanders in the region. She considers the newly introduced ideology and calls into question issues of relevance, context and applicability:

The conceptions of citizenship in liberal democracies make certain assumptions about the nature of society as well as the nature of personhood and take for granted so-called universal values such as democracy and human rights. But for most people in Oceania, especially those who are not schooled in Western liberal ideas and values and their associated languages, citizenship education is not so straightforward as one might like it to be. The idea of the nation state, for example, so closely linked with citizenship if one asks the question of 'citizenship of what nation?' is not yet fully understood among communities who were governed by foreigners who had different assumptions, values and beliefs. Fifty years ago, all of the people of Oceania (with the exception of Tonga) were under foreign rule, either that of Britain, France, the USA, Australia or New Zealand. Most gained their political independence in the 1970s and 80s, so the idea of an independent nation not to mention a feeling of belonging to one nation, with all that that implies, is a relatively recent phenomenon. (p.2) [Emphasis added]

Citizenship Education efforts the world over, appear to prioritize perceived universalities about what it means to be a citizen and to participate in a democracy. Given the limits of such a global perspective within an internationalized approach to CE, the need for localizing the teaching and learning of citizenship for Fiji is evident. Kerr (1999) articulates the need for contextualization, explaining that CE is necessarily the child of interpretation. His five pronged criteria for the contextual development of CE in-country includes: (1) historical tradition; (2) geographical position; (3) socio-political structure; (4) economic system, and (5) global trends (p.4).

'Relevance' for quality education remains critical and CE is largely influenced by political notions of democratic rule and governance taken from political perspectives of government, governance and citizenship rights in a politically democratic state. Veramu (2010), a Curriculum Trainer and Project Manager of the Fiji in-School Citizenship

Education Project funded by UNDP, emphasizes that CE, "... is expected to improve students (citizens) knowledge and understanding of the constitution and democratic processes" (Veramu 2010, p.2).

This is telling of the strong political grounding of the program. Simultaneously, the agendas of international agencies and donors cannot be denied with the above project being funded by the Australian Aid, European Union, New Zealand Aid and UNDP. The New Zealand and Australian agenda against the political situation in the country is exemplified in their stand on the need for an expedient return to democratic rule, as has been made known within the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Community. Notwithstanding these political agendas, New Zealand and Australian continue to contribute large sums of money towards educational development in Fiji through their respective aid agencies.

Citizenship Education in Fiji

A reflective analysis of the basis for CE indicates its grounding in *Value Theory* with an emphasis on the *transformative* role of education. At the very basic level, Value Theory in education simply refers to the implicit foundation of values that a country bases its entire educational planning on. In most cases, these values are inherent within the broad vision and mission of the national curriculum, or articulated distinctly as foundational or guiding values.

The educational philosophy articulated in the *Suva Declaration* provides an inclusive vision of the value and benefit of school based learning:

Education in schools will contribute to the spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional aesthetic and physical development of students who will have reverence for God. They will grow into healthy, happy, caring citizens committed to cultural, multi-cultural, religious understanding and tolerance; harmonious living; global co-existence; and environmental sustainability. Students will be informed, creative, responsible and productive citizens contributing to a peaceful, prosperous and just society. (Ministry of Education 2006, p.7)

This is juxtaposed against a reality of a content-full, resource-empty system which has on a superficial level removed the pressure of national examinations, but on the other replaced this with a series of multiple subject-based Internal Assessment (IA) tasks. The broad vision statement implies a liberal educational experience valuing the transformative role of education and experiential participatory learning. The school reality however, remains a rigid controlled environment, ill-equipped for the emancipatory objectives of holistic CE. School outcomes are still measured by scores and rankings with a mere shift from one form of written assessment to another. A 2008 research on the IA process conducted in Suva, provides some insight in highlighting the fact that teachers saw IA as detracting from the syllabus – some even admitted to ‘teaching to the IA’ in a product centered approach (Koya, 2008, p.45).

A second document, the Fiji Education Reform document *Building a Strategic Direction for Education in Fiji 2006 – 2015* stresses the qualities of an “ideal learner” in the 21st century as having “a democratic mind” and being “a holistic person who is

not only able to fulfill his or her life goals, but is able to contribute effectively to Fiji's society" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p.31).

The term *democratic* appears consistently in Fiji curriculum documents without any real description or definition of its intention and scope. Reflectively, in the Deweyan philosophy, democracy was, "... aimed at the enhancement of democratic education and ... democracy was cultural not political" (Saltmarsh, 1996, p.10). In Fiji, while a broad simple vision statement is expressed, the socio-cultural dimension of CE remains underscored.

Political events in Fiji resulting in the overthrow of the democratically elected government and the self-installed Military rule in 2006, led to a review of the CE program. Despite this, topics and issues remain focused on political democratic rule and the roles of a citizen within that politic under the five themes of 'democracy', 'peace and justice', 'cultures and beliefs', 'sustainable development', and 'human rights and responsibilities' (Ministry of Education 2010a, p.6).

This perspective of CE in the Fiji/Pacific context, assumes an understanding and value of nationhood. The content points at a program of study for political literacy. Further demonstrating the strong political emphasis, the Form 5 – 7 (Year 11 – 13) CE program was designed as part of the Fiji Good Governance Program offered by UNDP. As stated:

...the principal justification for citizenship education derives from the nature of democracy. Democracies need active, informed and responsible citizens – citizens who are willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and their communities and contribute to the political process. (Veramu 2010, p.4)

The socio-political context of nationality in Fiji for the forty years from Independence in 1970 until 2010, designated official nationality into three main categories - indigenous citizens as 'Fijian', those of Indian descent as 'Indian' (or Indo-Fijian), and the non-descriptive 'Others' included citizens who did not fit into the first two categories. However, in the context of the 1997 Constitution, Willoughby (2004) concludes,

... the statutes do not prescribe a single, unifying name for all people living in Fiji...and only uses the expression "the people of the Fiji islands"...consistent with the Fiji Constitution Review Commission, which had proposed the common name 'Fiji Islanders', but considered it was not necessary to make provision for this. Nor do the statutes prohibit any particular name from being used to designate all people living in Fiji. As a result, the debate is left wide open.

More recently, the 2010 Military rule has legislated 'Fijian' to include all Fiji citizens. Indigenous nationals are further identified as iTaukei. In the context of developing national consciousness and united nationalism at the symbolic interactionist level, problems with these new categories have been identified such as the need for ethnic baseline statistics in recording births, deaths, migration, fertility rates and disease demographics (Narsey, 2011)

While one of the CE themes is *cultures and beliefs*, and another, *sustainable*

development, the CE program does not begin from a local contextualized understanding of what it means to be Fijian and belong to Fiji. Nor does it explain the underlying platform for identity studies within a broader CE framework. The international and external agenda of CE has resulted in the development of a program that is skewed in focus and does not offer the potential to develop a critical mass for national conscientization towards a sustainable society of responsive critical and creative thinkers. Also alarming is that while OBE presents a noble vision, that is overlaid onto a product approach curriculum without due consideration to pedagogical concerns within a mixed-approach that includes process curriculum perspectives.

The untapped potential of CE for Nation-building in Fiji

Nation-building as a concept remains an abstract notion implying underlying principles of unity and social cohesion. Etzioni (2004, p.2) attempts to address this problem, “The phrase ‘nation-building’ is generally used to describe three related but different tasks: unification of disparate ethnic groups; democratization; and economic reconstruction”. CE for transformational change requires a combination of all three perspectives. The diversity of the Fiji citizenry necessitates *unification* and *democratic process*.

Transformational education realizes the need to affect changes of beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviour in relation to citizenry. Pedagogical tools for the affective domain (see Bloom’s taxonomy) are undoubtedly the most difficult to devise for a number of reasons not the least of which that these experiential learning outcomes are categorically immeasurable by means of traditional pen-paper tests and assignments. Assessment for learning must therefore provide critical and creative thinking and application opportunities. Mezirow (1997), on transformative learning; reminds us that, “Becoming critically reflective of the assumptions of others is fundamental to effective collaborative problem posing and solving” (p.9).

The Intended CE Curriculum

Community voice is integral to the development of a Fijian CE philosophy where current and hoped for realities of citizenship within Fiji as a nation-state are reflected. The *Interpretive Constructionism* paradigm (Eriksson 2007, p.15) provides a strong basis for the valuing of multiple socio-cultural/historical realities. Epistemologically, it is critical that a longitudinal study be conducted to ensure that the multiple perspectives of Citizenship in relation to being and belonging are documented. Such an exercise is crucial to establish the *entry point* of CE in regard to inherent assumptions and taking into consideration the value-laden nature of curriculum work at all levels. Dual considerations of *constructionism* and *constructivism* are of equal significance in this undertaking. In the constructionist view worthwhile knowledge about CE is socio-culturally/historically constructed by communities of knowers (constructionism). Contrastingly, in the constructivist view, attention is paid to the learning process and to learners’ capacity for knowledge acquisition. Both perspectives are critical to the philosophical framing of CE in any given context.

Essential terminology such as ‘citizen’, ‘citizenship’, ‘nation-state’, ‘nationality’, ‘nationhood’, ‘nation-building’, ‘national interest’, ‘national aspirations’, and

'nationalism' are central to this discussion. Equally important is the core issue of the perceived benefits of CE to the individual learner and to the nation, drawing from iTaukei and other culturally linguistic conceptions of these terms. This undertaking brings the conversation to the prime issues of 'being' and 'belonging' in context and what these entail.

Is it Citizenship or Civics Education?

Some use the terms Citizenship Education and Civics Education interchangeably, but it is important at the curriculum level to ensure the distinction between the two forms. The consensual philosophy of CE should rationalize the selection of choice. Despite teacher training on development and use of CE materials, the lack of ownership of CE implies that the level of awareness and support for the program will vary. The role of specialist curriculum developers is essential to construct curricula based on a CE philosophy that is reflective of community understandings.

A holistic and inclusive CE program should be premised on the Fiji Constitution and the recently compiled 'People's Charter' - the governing legislature of the country. If CE is to mean more than lip-service, real consideration must be given to the development of citizens who feel that they *belong*; and are *valued* and *valuable* members of society with community and national responsibilities.

To move CE beyond political literacy, Friere's notion of the liberating role of education towards emancipation and empowerment, prioritizing action, dialogue and conscientization is pivotal. Additionally, Kerr's three forms of CE may be viewed as phases within a holistic model; (1) Education *about* Citizenship; (2) Education *through* Citizenship; and, (3) Education *for* Citizenship. In the first phase, education about citizenship emphasizes cognition or knowledge transference. In the second phase, education through citizenship is driven by the notion of 'learning by doing' building on prior knowledge acquired in the first phase. The third and final phase, according to Kerr is education for citizenship. Here, students are equipped, "...with a set of tools (knowledge, understanding, skills, aptitudes, values and dispositions) which enable them to participate actively and sensibly the roles and responsibilities the encounter in their adult lives" (1999, p.12).

An inclusive philosophy of CE provides the basis for *curriculum mapping* which in turn indicates potential content-areas for CE integration and subject mainstreaming. Investing in a CE program that is not valued by students, teachers and the wider community in Fiji is a tremendous waste of resources and time.

The Enacted CE Curriculum

This relates to what happens at school and in particular in the classroom. It is concerned with planning effective instruction and assessment *of* and *for* learning. The latter is discussed in the next section on the assessed curriculum.

Evidence of poor pedagogical practice in Fiji highlighted by the Education Reports of 1969 and 2000, respectively, leads invariably to teacher preparedness, training, education and personal philosophies of teaching. Meaningful CE curriculum mainstreaming must be a 'cause' within teacher training and education institutions in Fiji. This means valuing and promoting CE to bring about teacher conscientization on

the life-long benefits of CE. This may take the form of content inclusion within courses and programs of study and community initiatives; where teacher trainees themselves are able to experience CE in all three forms: ‘about’, ‘through’ and ‘for’ Citizenship. In this way, teacher-practice is powerfully informed by the lived experience. Mezirow (1997) highlights the importance of discourse in the learning context. In his view, it is critical that teachers are able to provide opportunities for critical conversations/debates in safe learning spaces where each view point is valued. He maintains that critical reflection is key to this undertaking (p.10).

The pedagogical concern in Fiji remains the prevalent ‘certification’ mentality which is grounded on an examination-based education. The official focus may have shifted to an outcomes-based education, but there is no evidence to indicate that teaching practice has changed. In fact, it would appear that IA tasks and the final examination remain the primary concern of the educational process which contradicts the desire for authentic learning experiences as advocated by AfL. In order to facilitate this shift in teachers’ practice, teaching texts for CE in Fiji are needed, including teacher toolkits/manuals, teaching resources and assessment tool guides covering both AfL and AoL.

The Assessed CE curriculum

The debate about assessment highlights its importance for learning, emphasizing that unless and until a real shift of educational priorities takes place which removes the emphasis on test scores and task outcomes, CE is unlikely to have lasting impact in the school and in Fijian society. School and classroom practices should be monitored so as not to fall back into the routine chalk-and-talk, and quantitative outputs paradigm. Teacher toolkits and samples of good practice on planning assessment for CE are also key.

Final reflections on CE for Nation-building for Fiji

*Paint my gun
with the Fiji flag
red and white and blue
bananas
and warriors
and the faithful Union jack*

*Paint my gun
with the Fiji flag
So it matches my thermal mug
a rugby ball and a coconut tree
take a sip
then one, two, three
shoot to kill
and look at me
dressed up in the Fiji flag*

Excerpt from ‘Paint my gun’ (Koya, 2010b)

Fostering a Fijian National Consciousness built on ideals of diversity and multiculturalism, but providing a safe space within this for iTaukei indigenous rights, knowing and being within the context of Fiji will not be easy. For some *iTaukei*, the change in name, is not welcome - thus necessitating inclusive CE consultation. This implies political-will towards meaningful citizenry where awareness that the name change does not denigrate the indigenous rights or privileges to cultural heritage, land ownership or legal standing of the first peoples of the land.

Issues which need further analysis include the value of language as a mediatory of nation-building for national identity. In education, one such development is the inclusion of conversational Fijian, Hindi and Rotuman as new subject offerings. The role and use of the media in the promotion and delivery of CE and ways and the need to addressing racism in particular between the various ethnicities are additional areas of concern, as is the value of public spaces for critical and creative discourse.

CE provides a contingency for 'Fijians' beyond the rhetoric of a mandated label where nationals feel that they are 'of' Fiji, beyond a detached sense of merely living in the country. This sense of nationhood is key to constructing and maintaining connectedness of the national community, while being cognizant of multiple realities.

The current climate of internal political tensions and heavy media censorship presents a climate of fear within which CE Teachers, fearful of reprisal, may be uncomfortable to deal with issues of 'democracy'. An example is a 2010 CE inter-institutional workshop within the CE in-school program, which was introduced with a request to refrain from political discussions and to avoid the use of the word 'democracy'. It is puzzling to situate this program into such a climate of apprehension. A personal reflection is shared in the following verse from a poem titled *Checkpoint* (Koya 2010b).

*A friend of mine
Was taken to the barracks
She never talks about it
And I don't ask
Both of us afraid of what we might learn*

Stop!

Do not pass go.

Check point.

Indigenous and contextualized understandings of what it means to *belong* and to *be* of place contributes to understanding complexities of 'citizenship' within the Pacific. A major concern is the likelihood that little if any attempt will be taken to understand these ideas at the grassroots level as any attempt to develop CE in the absence of such dialogue is destined to fail. The critical pedagogy suggested is based on ideas conceptualizing and contextualizing CE within the Fiji reality, by drawing on a variety of theoretical frameworks. Of particular pedagogical concern are the dual strands of

constructionism, constructivism/ situated learning and the incorporation of indigenous pedagogies (cultural context and ways of learning). The globalized technological reality of the 21st Century, continuously references the *global community* and global citizenry. A transformative approach to CE may provide a platform to plant the seed for such a worldview.

Developing a national consciousness can bring about critical mass movements for change - a primary building block towards regional conscientization leading to the potential development of meaningful regional identity to inform and expand outward. As a Teacher Educator, and a Fijian of mixed ethnic heritage, I find myself coming to terms with the reality that hope is all that remains.

*While
My feet like roots
Have grown into this soil
My hands [still] reach for something intangible...*

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