Understanding Indigenous Fijian Notions of Child Development within Global Influences: Some Views From the Literature

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Abstract

Indigenous Fijian people's notions of child development have withstood the test of time as the 'currents of change' sweep through the shores of Fiji. These 'currents of change' have infiltrated the intricate fabric of the Indigenous Fijian society thus undermining culture and traditions of child rearing and development. This paper presents some views from the literature of the western and the 'others' notions of child development, with a hope to privilege and empower 'minority' indigenous knowledge such as that of the Indigenous Fijian notions of child development and others of the same ilk within a larger body of knowledge.

Keywords: *Fiji, indigenous, child, development*

Introduction

The island nation of Fiji is located in the southwest Pacific with approximately 330 islands scattered within the vicinity of the Fiji waters. It is considered to be the hub or crossroads of the Pacific Islands. A small nation with just under a million people, having a history of colonialism, there is evidence of conflict between western and Indigenous Fijian ideologies. Western ideologies tend to dominate over Indigenous Fijian traditional ideologies and I ask, should we continue to allow Indigenous Fijian ideologies to be de-merited in their own land? And should we continue to argue the merit of western education versus cultural values and beliefs? To answer these questions, it may be important to look back and reassess or re-examine the journey of so-called western education and perhaps make it more meaningful. During a regional conference by UNESCO that was held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, an attempt at this, via the theme of 'Education for Cultural Survival' was made. In this conference, participants representing the smaller cultures of the Pacific shared ways in which culture could be understood and given space in the western world of schooling (Teasdale & Teasdale, 1992).

Colonialism and education are two main ways through which European powers try to dominate and subjugate smaller cultures of the world (Altback & Kelly, 1978). In Fiji for example, the indigenous people were seen as backward, uneducated, uncivilized and ignorant (France,

1969). While others had more positive views of the Indigenous Fijians (Coulter, 1942), representations of the Indigenous Fijian by colonists were largely in the 'cultural deficit tradition' as Nabobo-Baba (2006) noted. Even schools were divided in what could be called a ranking system. There were schools for the elite group where it had the children of colonizers including children of the higher chiefs in Fiji, while the commoners had schools of their own. Nabobo-Baba (1996) referred to this as education for 'containment' in Fiji, keeping the Indigenous Fijian commoners in a subordinate position. This type of education made certain groups of Indigenous Fijians marginal in their own land. Altbach and Kelly (1978, p. 15) noted this about education within colonialism:

> It represented a basic denial of the colonizer's past and withheld from them the tools to regain the future...The schools omitted the child's past, as in history instruction...and at the same time denied him skills for anything other than what he had traditionally done - farming and engaging in craft. With this education, one might become a secretary or interpreter; one could not become a doctor or a scientist or develop indigenous cultures on their own terms.

Fiji had a history of education where the Indigenous Fijian language was denied in schools. English was the main spoken language, until recently in the early 70's when vernacular languages were being introduced and made compulsory at the lower levels (from Years 1, 2 and 3). Today Fiji's new Constitution (31. (3), p. 24) prescribes conversational and contemporary Indigenous Fijian and Fiji Hindi languages as compulsory subjects to be taught in all primary schools. Conversational and contemporary languages as stated in the Fiji constitution, can be said to be an addition to the demise of culture for the Indigenous Fijians. It is another form of cultural imperialism, as it doesn't articulate the need to learn formal languages as well. In regards to the continued dominance of the colonial language in the formal schooling process Thaman (2003, p. 5-6) noted:

> ...formal education in Pacific Island countries to transmit foreign cultural values via foreign languages...higher education is seen to be perpetuating the task, begun in school, of systematically changing and alienating them from cultures of their parents...Schools are one of the most undemocratic of places.

Indigenous knowledge is important in any nation. In Fiji for example, teaching and learning during pre-contact times was concerned with continuity. Here, Indigenous Fijian tribes and societies had teaching done in context. Learning involved listening and careful observation of the elder or skill expert being emulated (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). In the same vein, Baba (1986)

noted that learning of appropriate behavior by the young from elders, members of the clan and people from other related clans, were considered important. Baba (1986, p. 22) asserted further:

> The elders of the tribe or group would relate stories to the young, which would relate their histories, their origins, their value systems and their views of the universe. Learning was pragmatic and its outcomes were easily observable, in terms of food acquisition and other necessary materials for family comfort and the demonstration of appropriate attitude, values and behavior for community survival. There were also formal teaching sessions as well. When this happened, it was conducted by those considered: qualified within the group or clan.

As the waves of change continue to sweep through the shores of the Fiji Islands, colonization as in 'globalization' has birthed new ideas that have continued to go against the cultural norms and ideals of Indigenous Fijians. There is an urgent need for the revival and reformation of culture for the Indigenous Fijians. The most proper place for this revival and reformation is within the schools by decolonizing the school curriculum to include what matters for the Indigenous Fijians. This decolonization would include vernacular language as a teaching strategy. For the English language, instruction/s can be made more explicit, more experiential and with hands on learning with scaffolding, to lessen the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). This ensures that learning is relevant and contextual (Rogoff, 2003). In addition, more collaboration and teamwork would be needed, as these are all part and parcel of a child's world in an Indigenous Fijian context.

The small Islands of the Pacific need to take a proactive stance to revive what has been lost as a result of colonial legacy. The Re-thinking Pacific Education Initiative for and by Pacific People (2011) is a good example of this and should continue until there is satisfaction and we can say that our children 'belong' to a family, a culture and a community. 'Being' in early childhood is a time to enjoy and make meaning of the world, and 'becoming' as the child learns to grow in skills and knowledge of the culture to develop into active members of society (see Australian Early Years Learning Framework, 2009).

Another issue pertinent to discuss here is the notion of 'hybridity'. Yazdiha (2010) in his writing on conceptualizing hybridity spoke of deconstructing boundaries and asserts the importance of representations of collective identity which must be analyzed contextually. Yazdiha (2010) further asserted the need and willingness of academic institutions to reform their long held ideologies in the light of a changing world, as well as to consider alternative (non-Western) lenses as an essential practice in deconstructing knowledge, whether it is in curriculum or other areas of schooling. This is hybridity through hearing the 'voice' of others (Yazdiha, 2010).

What is Child Development?

Child development can be generally viewed as how a child grows over time in terms of physical well-being, social and emotional development, cognitive development and other aspects of human growth. Berk (2009) sees it as a developmental journey that all human beings go through. It provides an insight into how an individual is, was and will be in life in their societies. Different societies have varying ways of looking at child development that are reflective of a community's worldviews, cultural and other perspectives and epistemologies.

Contemporary theories like Rogoff (2003) and Jipson, (2001) recognize that the focus of child development and psychology has been reliant on western notions of how children grow and develop. Well-known psychologists and child development theorists like Piaget, Vygotsky, Freud, Bandura, Erickson, and others have contributed to the world of child psychology, however, not much has been said about the so-called 'others', the indigenous, First Nations or the Native peoples' ideas of child development. This paper focuses on these alternative notions of child development with particular emphasis on Indigenous Fijians ideas.

Western Theories and Ideas of Child Development

Notable theorists and child psychologists are interested in studying and theorizing how children grow and develop over time. These theorists according to Charlesworth (1996) tend to concentrate mainly in one area of child development. For example, Piaget focused on the children's development of logical thought, Vygotsky on culture and the importance of adult interaction to the child's learning, Sears and Bandura on social learning, Freud and Erikson on the child's social and personal development; Maslow on the hierarchy of human needs; Roger on the organization of self concept, and Gesell on the development of norms and the practical application of these to teaching and child rearing (Charlesworth, 1996).

Furthermore, Atherton (2011) and Arthur et al., (2008) cite Piaget's (1896-1980) views of children's development in a universal sequence of stages (sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete and formal) through which all children pass during childhood regardless of contexts. Other works of Piaget can be found in Donaldson (1984), Satterly (1987) and Wood (1998). Piaget's theory has been challenged by others like Vygotsky (1979) who indicated that not all children go through the same sequence of development and to expect them to do so leads to incorrect assumptions of children's intellectual abilities. Vygotsky (1979) also made the argument that Piaget had overlooked the cultural background and social groups of individuals, a very important aspect to take into consideration when viewing child development as asserted by Miller (2011).

Social child development theorist, Vygotsky (1979) stressed that a child's learning and development is influenced by the social world and particularly by the child's culture. For example, a society that stresses the importance of technologies such as computers and literacy, will expect the child to develop the ability to use these tools in developing their thinking (Arthur et al., 2008). Bretherton, (1992), Bandura (1977), and Bowlby and Ainsworth (1992), all have noted that

children develop new skills and information when they observe and learn behaviors from adults, parents and peers. If we apply this line of thinking, it would be assumed that Indigenous Fijians and communities of other first nations would have their own ways of conceptualizing and providing child development. Researchers such as Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) also suggest that different cultures create different contexts in which children grow and develop. Likewise, Rogoff (2003) suggests that understanding the worldviews of these different contexts, and the impact these have on child development, is essential in our increasingly globalized multi-cultural world.

There are some similarities and differences between traditional western notions of child development and those of Indigenous Fijians. Psychoanalytic child development theories of Freud and Erikson stress the importance of childhood events in shaping lifelong outcomes in children, a position now supported by neurobiological research (for example, Sims, 2008). In effect, this positions childhood as a preparation stage for adulthood. With Indigenous Fijian notions of child development, children are seen as important and they have a place in society, having their own roles and 'rights'. Within the communal whole they belong to, children are seen as little citizens who are part of the community and who have a responsibility towards the welfare of the group's survival (Nabobo-Baba, 2005). This contrasts with the western view of children's rights where children are positioned as independent individuals.

Cecil (2006), reflecting on Bronfenbrenner's (1917-2005) ecological model of child development, provides an understanding of how human development is structurally layered where interaction is not limited to a single setting. It takes into account the total environment within and beyond where children live. This theoretical positioning is useful to note in this discussion as it is closely linked to indigenous or first nations way of raising and developing children to become useful members of society. For Indigenous Fijians, for example, the idea of the 'circle of caring' (Gerlach, 2008) and the proverb of 'it takes a village to raise a child' (Butler, 1998; Marybeth & Robert, 2008) are paramount and meaningful.

Nabobo-Baba (2006) points out the centrality of *vanua* (The tribe in its totality: people, relationships, land, waterways, environment, resources, all living things within, knowledge systems and spirits). The *vanua* entails an interconnectedness between *lotu* (religion) and or spirituality, *veiwekani* (clan relationships) and *itovo/vakarau vakavanua* (acceptable cultural behaviors and values). Together these lay the foundation of people, development, and life, in the context of lived life in the tribe and among related peoples. The *vanua* is important to the Indigenous Fijian people because it is within this frame of life that everyone in the community is obligated to see to the development and the wellbeing of the child.

'Others' or First Nations Indigenous Theories and Ideas of Child Development

Post-colonial theorists such as Mohanty (2001) show that western notions are given power and authority to the detriment of the other ways of understanding and being in the world.

One impact of this type of imperialism has been that indigenous or first nations' theories of child development have never been at the forefront of research due to the dominance of the western ideas of child development and its related psychology. This imperialism and the idea that 'one size fits all' (Ball, 2005) may result in observations by the 'other' to note that their wisdoms and notions of child development are not valued and perhaps irrelevant for the modern era especially within formal education and the curriculum (Thaman, 2003). She argues further that this situation has been worsened when many indigenous or first nations' people continue to see their cultural ways as obstacles to, rather than the basis for success at school. To address such cultural deficit theorizing, Thaman (2003) further suggests the need for the Pacific Island people to reclaim the long-term principles of their traditional education systems, which are survival, continuity and sustainability, and to critically re-examine and interrogate elements in the schooling agenda of Pacific Island children. Thaman (2003) posits further that important selected values, knowledge, of indigenous children's background, should be made a part of the school curriculum given that children spend a lot of time in school nowadays.

First Nations – British Columbia

Ball (2005) in early childhood research on the Lil'wat Nation in British Columbia argues for the importance of looking with the eyes of the First Nations people and to keep what is culturally and educationally precious to support child development. She suggests that the First Nations people need to do things their own way so that they can remember, preserve, and pass on their culture to the next generation. Similarly, she points out the importance of indigenous children knowing their culture. Ball (2005) also noted the need to conceptualize the curriculum to help shape cultural identities and competence. There is a need to include 'a both world's' approach to the curriculum with pedagogical models that signify equity between first nations and western ideas. Such ideas can also be seen among scholars in the Pacific such as, Harris (1992) and Nabobo-Baba (2006), Thaman (2003) amongst others.

Likewise Priest et al., (2010) proposes four guiding principles of an Aboriginal tribe (Anangu and Yapa in the remote desert region of central Australia) that *"defines and describes a child's relationship and responsibilities to their environment"* (p. 62). The researchers noted that active listening, respect and collaboration were paramount as well as imparting stories, rules and regulations, and knowledge embedded in the culture. On a similar note, Barnhardt and Kawagley's (2005) research on *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Alaskan Native Ways of Knowing,* comment that indigenous people *"traditionally acquire their knowledge through direct experiences in the natural world"* (p. 11) which is different from western science that tends to emphasize compartmentalization of knowledge that is often decontextualized and taught in the detached settings of a classroom or the place we call school.

Maoris of New Zealand

Hemara (2000) noted that during pre-European times, the education of Maori children was shared between the home and the community. From their grandparents and parents, they learned the language and standards of behavior. In the community they developed skills in fishing, hunting, gardening, house building, cooking, mat making, and basketry. Experts taught the more difficult arts like woodcarving and tattooing, while instruction in tribal law was given to the sons of chiefs and priests in a building known as the "whare-wananga".

Like other First Nations peoples, the Maoris of New Zealand were also subjects of colonization and their "struggles against colonial hegemony persisted" (Harrison, 2005, p. 46) throughout New Zealand. This resulted in the establishment of Kura Kaupapa Schools and the Kohanga-Reo. In these institutions, Maori children, those who have some Maori blood ties, and those that chose to, were immersed in learning Maori. This is with the understanding that the Maori will be able to revitalize their culture, with learning starting at an early age and carried right through to the senior years in Kaupapa Maori culture with elders playing a significant role in the process.

Maori pedagogies and traditional child rearing practices were taught and learned through children emulating adults (Hemara, 2000). Skilled Maori elders would conduct informal training and learning for children in the form of one-on-one tutorials; "this way allowed the elders and the learners to confirm family relationships by forging close social and economic dependency" (p. 9). Teaching and learning started even while the child was still in the mother's womb. Hemara (2000) further noted that the Maori grandparents' role was to oversee the upbringing and education of their grandchildren. In pre-contact times, the relationship between curricula and the environment were strong and recognizable; it allowed 'controlled-risk' experimentation and relaxed learning. He noted further that audiences and participants who supported and showed enthusiasm did assessments of the youth's tasks during performances. Hemara (2000) clearly puts it "...tupuna [elders] went to great pains to record their traditions and ways of being. The best way to honor them and their work is to make use of the principles they developed over millennia" (p. 12).

The Natives of Hawaii

Native Hawaiians like Maori are faced with displacement within their homeland by colonizers from North America and to some extent Asia (Brown & Bloom, 2009). The influence of the Christian missionaries coupled with the infiltration of Eurocentric ideas penetrated the native Hawaiians' way of doing and seeing things. They were seen as 'heathen' (Grace & Serna, 2013, p. 310) and converting them to Christianity was a way of educating them to see 'the light'. Prior to colonization, children did not attend any formal school system, but were taught by the elders of the 'Ohana' or extended family, who were the teachers of young children. They noted further that learning was done through listening, observing and assisting in tasks performed daily both in and outside of the household.

Today, stringent measures are being taken to revive the lost roots and tools of learning for native Hawaiians. This is being done through culture-based educational practices in both Hawaiian focused charter schools and other established community programs (Grace & Serna, 2013). The focus is to strengthen native Hawaiian people's self-concepts through native Hawaiian immersion programs.

Noole of Solomon Islands

While this does not reflect the whole of the Solomon Islands, what is described here is on the Noole people, a cultural group in the Solomon Islands. Lima (2003) described the 'education' of the Noole people in the indigenous context as a lifelong process, beginning in childhood and continuing on to adulthood through social interaction with people and the environment. Lima further noted that children in this cultural group are required to learn worthwhile knowledge and live to keep their culture alive through practising traditional knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviors that are culturally appropriate. Survival skills are taught to children, as this is the main goal of the Noole society.

All activities carried out were aimed at cultural survival and continuity. Female children are expected to be beside their maternal elders and learn female roles such as weaving, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of small children. Likewise males are expected to be beside their paternal elders to learn male oriented tasks like fishing, building, hunting and gardening. However, some skills may be taught to both sexes, such as gardening and pig raising, and even fishing (Lima, 2003).

The Kiribati People of Kiribati

In Kiribati, Teaero (2003) noted the importance of context in an attempt to understand the worldviews of his people. As a child grows up, he/she is taught the knowledge of the tribe one belongs to. This knowledge deals with skills that are directly related to survival such as land ownership, genealogy, weaving, house and canoe building, fishing and navigation. Children are also taught knowledge that enhances the enjoyment of leisure such as poetry, oratory and dancing.

Teaero (2003) further noted that the content of teaching and learning primarily focused on daily living, enjoyment of leisure and continuity. Children are taught aspects of relationship and respect in one-way verbal communication from the teacher to the learner. Hands-on learning is the norm and children are taught at a very early age to listen to and accept unconditionally what adults tell them. This is deemed to be not only the proper way to learn but also a form of respect for the more knowledgeable older kinsperson. As children continue to grow, they learn to understand divisions of labor as these are based on gender lines. There is clear demarcation between the genders in areas such as the learning of knowledge, skills and activities. These of course has continued to undergo change and evolve through time.

Indigenous Fijian Children

The ways of knowing (epistemology) of the indigenous Fijians are important to the education of their children (Nabobo-Baba, 2005, 2006). This is conveyed in the particular worldviews held by Fijian society (Ravuvu, 1983). According to Muir (1987, p. 12), the world for the indigenous people is made up of entities, which are related in an unscientific but spiritual way, which reflects the perceptions on the nature of the universe quite differently from the western world. Further, Sims (2011) suggests differences are everywhere in the world therefore highlighting the importance of 'differences' as part of being human. Likewise Perkes (1998), in the study of Mexican American children, argues for the importance of 'cultural context theory' where children should be understood from their cultural perspectives and not be labeled as 'deprived' but rather seen as different.

For indigenous Fijians, members of the immediate family and clan members teach their children important knowledge as part of everyday life. It is through this niche that indigenous Fijian children are instructed, advised and reprimanded. Nabobo-Baba (2006, p. 116) says *"children learn by being told things explicitly and by emulating adults"*. Teaching is done face to face and the silent listener watches and learns at the same time. Nabobo-Baba also explains that 'telling' is repetitive, consistent and contextual. Mentoring is a cultural obligation of parents and adults to ensure that traditional knowledge and customs are properly imparted (p, 116).

An indigenous Fijian child among other things is also being told of who s/he is in relation to other things in life (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). In addition, the child will learn about his/her *vanua*, his/her people, the natural environment and the spiritual world (Ibid). The child is also exposed to important traditional customs and culture by parents, immediate family members, close relatives and members of the village community (Martin, 2008). For example, in traditional ceremonies, children are made to sit, listen and watch attentively until they are called by the elders to actually carry out the tasks. Watching, seeing and listening are important avenues of learning. Indigenous Fijian children watch and learn what is deemed as acceptable and appropriate behavior (as well as the opposite) from adults and follow accordingly. It is here that Nabobo-Baba reiterated the importance of having enough adults or elders in the village community or in the *vanua* so children can learn from them. This has implications on the importance of health today and longevity.

Harris (1992) in his study of Aboriginal children notes five major aboriginal learning processes that are similar and worth noting in relation to Indigenous Fijian children learning styles; *learning by observation and imitation or learning by looking and copying; learning by personal trial and error; learning in real life rather than practice in artificial settings; learning context specific skills; personal orientation in learning and not information orientation* (pp. 38-39). Harris further notes the importance that teachers of Aboriginal children understand and incorporate these learning processes; in other words, there is a need to indigenize classroom teaching so it is more relevant and meaningful to the Aboriginal children. For Indigenous Fijian

children, it may be useful to look at indigenizing western concepts of teaching and learning as one way to facilitate success. Lewis-Jones (1957, p. 110) succinctly puts Fijian notions of educating the young as such:

> The participation of the young in various tribal activities constituted what we call schooling in Fijian society. Most of these activities concerned the immediate needs of, duties of the social unit; hence the training was direct, realistic and purposeful as well as exacting. Each social function, each activity was an opportunity for the uninitiated to learn and acquire the skills and knowledge of the federation.

This is in line with Vygotsky (1978) and is a reasonable summary of indigenous Fijian ways of learning and knowing that is contextual, relevant, definitive and continuous; learning that is preparing the young for life in society; teaching understanding and conformity to customs and traditions, while learning is not done in a separate institution but integrated with living (Bakalevu, 2001).

The Indigenous Fijian child is taught and developed through instructions from elders in society. They observe and imitate what they see by the older people around, through collaboration with guided participation and observation of others (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). Boys are expected to do the masculine jobs like gardening while the girls do the feminine jobs like cooking and cleaning the house. There are exceptions of course to the norm. The child is expected to obey rules and orders silently and is considered disrespectful if he/she questions back, especially in probing ways. Questions that seek clarification are deemed acceptable, as they are "information-seeking" (Ibid). Silence is expected; this is because being of a quieter disposition, to speak less and listen more, is deemed as an attribute of the wise (Ibid) and is pivotal in Fijian culture. Nabobo-Baba (2006) puts it succinctly *"silence emits dignity, and summons respect that transcends all in a vanua. It is also indicative of high birth and excellent upbringing"* (pp. 95-6). She notes further that silence is 'loaded' and it is not the same as being ignorant in ideas and opinions as often misinterpreted by some.

Further, the Indigenous Fijian child is a relational person, within a 'relational ontology' as described by Martin (2008), and living in a socialized and collective setting that has strong bonds and is under the watchful eyes of the elders particularly in a village or tribal setting. The child's upbringing is not only the responsibility of the parents, but the whole *tokatoka* (extended family), *mataqali* (sub-clan) and *koro* (village). The notion of "it takes a village to raise a child" is evident here. An aunt or uncle can correct a child if s/he does wrong. The parents will remain silent because traditionally and culturally, the relatives have the right to do so. These are changing in certain areas of Fiji of course. Children are encouraged and learn to be responsive to family needs and goals in order to prepare them to work on tasks together in groups later as young adults (Ravuvu, 1983). In schools, Indigenous Fijian children learn not to ask questions, as it's a show of

disrespect (Valdes, 1996). Furthermore, learning for the children is embedded in a social environment with the presence of elders and other related people. He notes the goal is always group success rather than the success of the individual.

Nabobo-Baba and Tiko (2009) further noted that in the predominantly oral culture of the Indigenous Fijians, knowledge construction is a communal activity and dialogic in character. It is also deeply embedded in ecology (social, cultural, physical, spiritual and political environment) and defines the relationships of all things, secular and spiritual. There is an assumed 'taken for granted-ness' that all "who belong to a place" will display cultural responsibility for what they deem of value and belonging to them, knowledge and epistemology included. Within this understanding, empiricism is only one way to verify truth. The others: experimental, the supernatural, nature/ the elements, elders, chiefs' *mana* [special powers] the *mana* of the *vanua*, the herald clan are among other verifiers of truth (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). Further in this epistemology, one's learning in the *vanua* then becomes everyone's responsibility. When we talk of child development or child rearing, we are talking of every relation taking turns to ensure a child, ward or trainee is learning well, in a place that he/she finds love and comfort, surrounded by those who they share deep clan relationships with. 'We look after our own' is perhaps the often-understated tenet of such relational ontology (Nabobo-Baba& Tiko, 2009).

Na Veituberi (teaching, nurturing and capacity building)
The essence of Veituberi (teaching & mentoring): Touching the Heart and Soul

Nabobo-Baba and Tiko (2009) further note the tenacity of this indigenous group in affirming themselves against the context of the "global". They explain:

> The Indigenous Fijian (children) will always be Indigenous Fijian (children), they will be still here, and are still here. Cultures, knowledge and all...with certain things getting better, certain things getting worse...we are here... *(p. 79).*

Too often, Indigenous Fijian children are taught in school to temper their feelings with some degree of objectivity, while a close look at this epistemology signals a difference- **the heart** *(uto)* **and soul** *(yalo)* are emphasized to be important elements of the learning trip if a child is to take seriously and not to forget the lessons being taught (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). Further she notes that pedagogically, this is what the teacher or nurturer works on- the mind or brain is important but more important still, is winning the heart and soul of the learner, if quality education and behavioral change is to take place.

Many parents, many teachers

For the Indigenous Fijians, the young learn about important Indigenous Fijian knowledge at home as well as from all other clan members as part of everyday life. All members of a village can *instruct, 'story', advise or reprimand* a young child. Parents, relatives and elders are just all part of the whole "teaching fraternity" in a *vanua*. This means that while the teaching is going on (consciously scheduled or otherwise), the child is learning because there are established relationships and understandings of respect, commitment and service on both sides as stipulated in custom, cultural, and behavioral practices. It also suggests a learning context where "*teaching and nurturing*" are shared with grandparents and "others" while parents may play a dominant role still. This "shared teaching fraternity" may mean that in the final analysis "the strength and weaknesses" of the "many teachers" are picked up by the learner, generally quietly. The learner is cushioned however from the "adverse influences of the bad teachers" because in a small community context of learning, teachers of value are well known as daily critiques and *vanua* discourses of good and exemplary behaviors as well as the opposite, are rampant in the community (Nabobo-Baba, 2006).

Manner and deportment

Learning, manner, deportment and tone are just as important, if not more important than what is said (Nabobo-Baba & Tiko, 2009). For Indigenous Fijians, a person is judged hard by their manner of speech and disposition. Meyer (2003) has made a similar observation in Hawaii. She notes that in Hawaiian epistemology one's manner of speaking is especially important (p. 117). The way words are strung together determines to a large extent the type of response one gets. With regards to important *vanua* knowledge, knowledge of how to speak is also of the essence and Indigenous Fijian children are taught these. This is not to suggest that all learning is formal and serious. *Humor and banter are also used as vehicles of knowledge transmission.* Humor and banter take place daily with Fijians, especially among cross cousins and vitabani[1]. A lot is learned through this as well, especially the learning of relationships among people.

To learn is to keep Quiet, Listen and Do

While the elderly and chiefs speak, Indigenous Fijians remain quiet, listen and only question to clarify points made here and there. This is because among Fijians, learning is done by the quietly determined; those that know how to listen and are willing to do work. In ceremonies, for instance, the young are made to sit, look and learn to hear "verbalized knowledge as well as deciphering silences"[2]. As earlier stated, this process carries on this way until the young is called

[1] This is a type of customary relationship between two related groups of peoples or tribes and it involves playing tricks at each other, poking fun and deriving fun and joy – while outdoing each other in a competitive way.
[2] See Nabobo-Baba (2005) on a proposed Fijian cultural taxonomy of silence.

on by the elders to actually carry out the ceremonies. Seeing and listening are therefore important avenues of learning among our people (Nabobo-Baba & Tiko, 2009). Listening is a dominant pedagogical tool. Indigenous Fijian children are trained ever since they are born to listen and hence are expected to develop sustained behaviors and skills in listening (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). In such situations, storytellers and teachers are expected to give their "truths" and impart wisdom through eloquence. She notes further that language and communicative acts (including silences) are shared and understood (presumably) between teacher and learner, and between the elder and the child.

The impact of understanding different notions of child development

It is important that we understand child development in different contexts when designing educational programs for young children. As noted earlier, a few child development theories and psychologists in the western world have withstood the test of time in providing proven frameworks for understanding children's development and learning[3] (Onchwari & Onchwari, Keengwe, 2008) which are still used in modern curricula today.

The effectiveness of these frameworks in shaping learning experiences for indigenous/first nations children is increasingly being questioned. First nations' researchers[4] and others, such as Bennett (2004) show that there are vast differences in educational achievement of indigenous/first nations children compared to children of western origin. These may be due to the epistemological differences that children face in schools from peers and teachers. Plevitz (1997) argues that the poor performances of indigenous children may be due to differences in, the opportunities provided to the learner coupled with indigenous children having different cultural contexts and life experiences. Little (1995) argues likewise as she suggests that the 'system' itself perpetuates disadvantages for indigenous students in their own countries and this may include refugee children in war torn countries as well as children of political asylum seekers. In the United States, Hanson (2009), Cook & Cordova (2006), Johnson, (1997) and National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) (2005) have pointed out national data, dating back forty years which reveal educational disparities across racial and ethnic groups such as Hispanic/Latino, African American, American Indian and Pacific Islander ethnic groups. This is a concern as these minority groups have been under represented at all levels of education (NCES, 2005).

Likewise in New Zealand, a study of intercultural perceptions and academic achievement by Nakhid (2003) showed disparity in academic achievement between Pacific Island students and the Pakeha white students. Teachers of Pacific students perceived the 'identity' of Pacific students differently, adversely affecting their learning (Ibid). This is further reiterated by the study of indigenous epistemology (Macfarlane, Glyn, Grace, Penetito & Bateman, 2008) on the

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[3] See for example, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Erikson's psychosocial theory, Piaget's cognitive theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.
[4] For example Ball, 2004; Taufe'ulungaki, 2002; and Thaman 2003.

importance of culture in education by Bishop and Glynn (1999), which further suggests that the educational gap and under achievement of Maori students was due to inappropriate educational programs. These programs were judged culturally inappropriate in relation to the students' identities and experiences. These epistemological differences are key as earlier indicated by Sims (2011) that *"difference is not embarrassing, it is exciting"* (p. 11) and can be turned into positive influencial factors to promote indigenous children's success. However, standardized curricula make it difficult to value differences while those who are different are expected to conform to the norm. The results, for students from different backgrounds, are that the knowledge and understanding they bring into the learning environment are not valued or recognized.

Children will demonstrate successful learning when different knowledge and experiences are identified, valued and built upon. Ball and Simpkins (2004) in their research on Canadian First Nations describe the success of indigenous people with the use of a 'generative curriculum model' (GCM) and the use of the "community of learners approach" in the education program. It also incorporates indigenous ideas into the early childhood care programs. It is clear from the research that when the educational programs include the worldviews of such indigenous groups that there is a positive effect on children's learning and therefore their success.

Early years educational programs in Fiji need to be designed in culturally appropriate ways that underpin the understanding of Indigenous Fijians or the 'other', their values and beliefs of child development. It cannot be refuted that changes have swept through the shores of Fiji from colonial and post-colonial times. These changes have caused increasing tensions between indigenous ideologies of learning, knowing, being and doing, and the contemporary ideologies, for instance, of self and individualism. Thaman (2001) argues that these tensions have had an impact on the education system of the smaller Pacific Island States, which have even led teachers to think that their own culture and epistemologies are inferior to those of the west or the colonial masters. Further, Fiji's curriculum from colonial days to today, is reflective of colonial and neocolonialism forces shaping its national history and especially resembling donor prescriptions (Nabobo-Baba, 2003; Sanga, K. et al., 2005).

Further research in the Pacific region (Thaman, 2001 & Nabobo-Baba, 2005) indicate that despite reforms in changing curricula, quality education for the indigenous Pacific people remains largely elusive. Pene, Taufe'ulungaki and Benson (2001, p. 1) note that education inequality could be attributed to the *"increasing incongruence between values promoted by formal western schooling and the indigenous value system"*. Fiji's statistics in the Education Commission Report (2000) indicated that Indo-Fijian students continue to do better and excel academically compared to their Indigenous Fijian counterparts (Education Commission Report 2000). This, however, prompted the government then (Qarase Government) to construct an Affirmative Action in 2001 called the Indigenous Fijian Education Blueprint. This mapped a way forward for the Indigenous Fijian students. Some saw the blueprint as racist and others felt that it was good initiative that

had been implemented poorly, with those who needed the assistance most, not benefitting from the scheme (Lal, 2012).

More recently the 2007 National Curriculum Framework for Fiji funded by the Australian government followed the Western Australian model of Outcomes Based Learning. This model was discontinued due to the inability of the country to meet the resource needs of such reforms amongst other reasons. This was a clear sign of the drawbacks of importing foreign curricula to a host country largely un-adapted, and where such things as economic differences and political instability impede the success of such foreign infused reforms. This has been discontinued after five years of its existence. Today in 2013, the National Curriculum Framework is on trial to be used in schools. The Early Childhood Curriculum Guidelines called *Na Noda Mataniciva translated as 'Our Pearl'* has continued with its Outcome Based approach. While the continuation may highlight the importance of the early years, there are a few mixed messages and questions have been raised as to why it is not continued in the curriculum of the older students. To date *Na Noda Mataniciva* is now used in some parts of Fiji, though un-trialed and not evaluated or critiqued for a second opinion by Early Childhood Education experts for its validity and reliability. In addition, more than approximately eighty percent of Early Childhood Education teachers need to be trained in the program.

Na Noda Mataniciva (2009) is silent on anything indigenous, including the values and beliefs of Indigenous Fijian child development; however, the phrases 'inclusive curriculum', 'caters for ALL children' and 'holistic curriculum' are readily seen on its script. The curriculum document is more in tune with 'multiculturalism', which to my understanding is another Eurocentric term used to undermine the ideologies of the Indigenous Fijian people and should be critically researched for what effect it has on the education of minority cultures like indigenous Fijians.

Multiculturalism as an idea needs to be interrogated and care must be taken so that dominant world cultures are not given equal status in the islands or worse dominate smaller Pacific cultures in the guise of achieving multiculturalism. Questions like 'Whose culture is represented and dominant in multiculturalism?' need to be asked. Second, when a dominant world culture comes into multicultural contact with a smaller Pacific culture, what happens to both? Other questions may include: Which cultures have international support? Which are more localized? Which has resources by the fact that they are diasporic? These questions are relevant to Fiji.

While arguments may arise out of the above, it is still imperative and proper to include indigenous people's knowledge and ideas of education into the curriculum. Classic examples of educational programmes that incorporate culturally appropriate practices are the Te Whariki (New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum) and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia. These two documents acknowledge the history of the indigenous people and take pride in their ancestral history as part of the learning journey of their children. First Nation's people or

the indigenous people of the world can learn from such documents in order to have better outcomes for indigenous children. Sims (2011) points out that when children have better outcomes, countries will economically prosper and increase its productivity.

Implications for Classroom Teaching

One of the major implications of this paper is that, there is a need for Early Childhood professionals to understand the cultural background of children in order to bridge the gap between Early Childhood Education curriculum and indigenous knowledge and epistemology. This is to ensure holistic development thus bringing effectiveness to the early childhood programs. Thaman (2003) emphasized likewise the need for education focusing on cultural survival in Pacific Islands teacher education programs.

Nabobo-Baba, (2005, p. 302) further adds that there should be understanding and realization that "there are many kinds of knowledge and many ways of knowing the world" and in this case enabling and inclusive early childhood environments would involve *veituberi/veivakatavulici* (teaching and learning) in the Fijian context. The elders' *qasenivuli* (teacher) teach, the young *gonevuli* (student) model the rituals and the cultural obligations on a daily basis, and the young will do likewise when his/her time comes. In order to allow this, early childhood teachers need to have space for the understanding of indigenous children's cultural identities, heritages, pedagogies and epistemologies. The child will feel supported and have a sense of belonging when this is present in formal schooling. Working towards change and understanding one's culture would be what Chin and Benne (1969) describe as "normative re-educative". This involves "changes in attitudes, values, and skills...not just changes in knowledge, information, or intellectual rationales for action and practice" (p. 34). Such a move is enhanced through deep reflection to understand one's or others' beliefs, knowledge and reasoning.

Conclusion

The paper brings to light child development discourses of the west and those of the 'other'. The 'other' refers to the small cultures of the world, in this case, the indigenous Pacific peoples. These people are the majority community in their islands, but are minorities if seen against bigger world populations. The paper discusses what constitutes child development in minority communities, looking at some indigenous cultures of the world like the Aborigines of Australia, Maoris of New Zealand, First Nations of Canada and in Oceania, the natives of Hawaii, the Solomon Islands and specifically the indigenous Fijians.

The paper calls for attention to cultural understanding of indigenous Fijian children in Early Childhood Education environments and programs. Early Childhood teachers can use such an understanding to enhance the development of teachers who take seriously their stations to be models of conduct and instill the intellectual virtues needed for a beneficial teaching-learning environment. From this standpoint the natural environment, and (young people *(kawa)* and

people (*tamata*) in general) are theorized as a tribe's wealth and inheritance, given by God for the tribe in the past for the people living today, and for those yet to arrive in the future (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). Given this paradigm, the natural environment and the people who own these both become non-negotiable entities and necessitate mentoring and teaching of values that will contribute to a community's continuity and cultural survival.

Although Indigenous Fijian knowledge, like all other indigenous knowledge systems, are in a perpetual state of change, the *vanua* and its inherent and epistemological philosophies are the most important aspect of Fijian life and identity and remain pivotal to indigenous life. Yes, there is no isolation; culture and indigenous knowledge are fluid and Fijians adopt new things and adapt to new circumstances, but still as a group of people and a minority world culture, there is a dire need to safeguard their cultures, ways of living and values especially those that have sustained them as a people, indigenous wisdoms included.

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