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The motif on the cover is based on a nineteenth century carving of a ship's prow from Choiseul, Solomon Islands. To *Directions: Journal of Education Studies*, it signifies forward movement.

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## Curriculum Review and Development in the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education, The University of the South Pacific.

This Issue is dedicated to the loving memory of Vulori Sarai who passed away in 2019.

She was a phenomenal woman - friend, colleague and educator par excellence. Her words will live on through this Issue and her work will live on through the lives of her many students.

## Introduction

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Welcome to this special edition of **Directions: Journal of Educational Studies** that evolved out of the curriculum review and development work conducted in programmes in the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education (FALE) from 2017 onwards.

Curriculum design at universities has traditionally been a private endeavour. However, scholarship and experience has demonstrated the importance of an integrated and aligned curriculum to provide students with an integrated learning experience. At the University of the South Pacific (USP), work towards a more integrated curriculum began with the STAR (Strategic Total Academic Review) process, which involved the development of the USP Graduate Outcomes, Programme Graduate Outcomes, Curriculum Maps, and Course Learning Outcomes. While notable progress was made during the STAR process, some gaps in curriculum review practices have also been observed. In this context, to mark the University's 50th anniversary and conclusion of the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, FALE made a collective commitment to make further progress with curriculum alignment in 2018, under the guidance of an Assessment Consultant. In particular, staff agreed to review Programme Graduate Outcomes, Curriculum Maps, the alignment of Course Learning Outcomes with USP Graduate Outcomes as well as Programme Graduate Outcomes, and the alignment of course assessments with Course Learning Outcomes and Graduate Outcomes. This was the University's first Faculty-wide initiative of its kind.

The idea of the journal was to capture different perspectives from participants in this particular process, as well as other insights into the dynamics of curriculum development in the contemporary tertiary context and the specific environment of The University of the South Pacific. Importantly, the journal was also an opportunity to incorporate research inquiry and reflection into the curriculum initiative to inform future work and to signal the vital interplay between teaching and research. In this special issue, we aim to document our collective experience with educational, inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary papers contributed by staff from all FALE Schools that reflect on, review, and evaluate their curriculum alignment process, challenges and outcomes. Themes of the papers include (but are not limited to) the personal or collective critical reflections on the curriculum alignment process; review of the changes made to specific courses or programmes; critical reflections on the challenges and significance of curriculum alignment in the context of Pacific island higher education; exploration of curriculum alignment challenges and outcomes by academic staff with non-education disciplinary backgrounds; empirical analysis of student/staff responses to curriculum alignment; exploration of the change process from different perspectives; and, reflections on building a community or communities of practice.

The articles in this edition are a reminder that any institutional or programme initiatives related to learning and teaching in higher education can never occur in a vacuum and will reverberate with contentious issues in the current tertiary setting both at the international and local levels. In this respect, the five articles in this journal are narratives about curriculum matters, but also tell a story about the debates, influences and concerns in contemporary higher education.

One theme that recurs in these articles is the underlying question of ownership of the curriculum. This theme expresses itself in a variety of ways in the different contributions including a tension between institutional requirements and the values, priorities and educational goals of individual academics or those in a particular discipline. This issue is highlighted in the article written by Fiona Willans who emphasizes the unfortunate decisions that can be made when compliance becomes disassociated from pedagogical principles and when the needs and wisdom of those designing and teaching courses are disregarded in the interests of notions of standardization and efficiency. The concerns that she voices also raise serious questions about the efficiency and accountability model that has become one of the dominant discourses in higher education over the last two decades. Fiona's article reminds us that the academy and its members may be in danger of prioritizing these goals at the expense of genuine intellectual inquiry. The quality preoccupation in higher education which has been expressed in many curriculum initiatives undertaken at USP is always in danger of being overtaken by the prevalent narratives of quality, compliance and efficiency. At the same time, Fiona's article also demonstrates that collective inquiry into what a programme should be offering and the goals for its students, can be a rich and constructive process. The description of the decision-making process to determine the outcomes for a new Cook Islands Māori programme, provides an informative example of a rigorous and considered process that, in turn, framed decisions about the nature of courses and assessment tasks. Similarly, the current courses in Hindi were being reviewed in order to ask key questions about their focus and aims and whether these needed to be reconsidered. Interestingly, the initial questions came from a managerialist concern about the economic viability of the Hindi programme, but the academics involved use this as an opportunity to ask much more fundamental and important questions.

Fiona's article is a reminder that the tension between systems and pedagogy may be at work in the institution outside the immediate forums in which academics talk about their courses and programmes. One crucial example of this is the current burdensome and longwinded processes for making changes to courses. Such a process can stifle both initiative and goodwill on the part of academics.

The question of curriculum ownership and institutional imperatives recurs in a different form in the article by Kanemasu, Rakuita and Kopf who discuss the response of the Sociology programme to two different institutional requirements, curriculum review and the conversion of their courses to an online learning mode. Questions of ownership of the curriculum have inevitable ideological implications and the Sociology team also questioned whether work on the curriculum could be interpreted as part of the neoliberal agenda to standardize and rationalize higher education and consequently be inimical to the unique Pacific identity. However the article suggests how, in some cases, with determination and conviction, it is possible to infuse an institutional requirement with personal meaning and relevance in a manner that allows academics to shape it to meet their own educational values. It is clear from this article that the authors had a well-articulated vision about what was important in their learning and teaching, with regard to Pacific epistemological relationships and communities. There are many pedagogical developments recounted in this article, but from the point of view of managing institutional imperatives, the discussion suggests that, in certain circumstances, institutional requirements can be converted into meaningful and productive educational experiences that can capture academics' core values. The authors themselves argue that "the incorporation of international curricular trends or digital technologies is not in itself necessarily repressive or transformative, it is the manner in which such change is navigated, steered and embodied on the ground that has significant pedagogical and social consequences" (p. 19). The authors also contend that the encounter between institution and individual agents can be less bruising if academics are given the space to interpret and implement curriculum requirements. Under these circumstances, they suggest, it has been possible to approach curriculum review "as a medium of stocktaking, scrutinizing and re-imagining our own practices as Pacific Island educators" (p. 20).

Reflecting another dominant narrative of contemporary higher education their article also recounts the experience of managing the institutional imperative to put their Sociology courses on line. Yoko Kanemasu, one of the authors, recalls her initial feelings of apprehension about the prospect of foregoing the immediacy and interactive dynamics of the classroom the potential anonymity of the online learning experience. Allied to this was a concern to facilitate a process of learning that was a “dialogic process of collective knowledge construction” that reflects the spirit of Talanoa and Pacific ways of knowledge construction (p. 22). With these convictions in mind, Yoko set about investigating and developing her courses in the online environment and engaging in curriculum development with a heightened awareness of the efforts that are needed to establish a learning experience that is in keeping with Pacific epistemologies. The article describes the different initiatives that were set up in conjunction with the Centre for Flexible Learning and the resulting enriched community dimension as well as an improvement in academic results. This article demonstrates the importance of academics reaffirming their own educational priorities and values so that they are in a position to use institutional requirements to strengthen their own learning spaces.

The challenges of negotiating the mix of institutional imperatives and academics’ participation in curriculum development work also surfaces in the article by Spiller, Armstrong and Sharma who report on an initial inquiry into academics’ perceptions of participation in curriculum development work. They locate their investigation within the context of current trends in higher education, particularly towards neo-liberalist business models with their narrow paradigms of quality accountability. In addition, there is background compliance culture which becomes problematic when there is a belief that the rules and regulations necessarily define success and a high level of performance. Participants’ comments on the curriculum process are also explored in relation to broader institutional traditions, stories and assumptions, such as ideas about academic autonomy, collegial decision-making, discipline-specific norms and conceptions of teaching and learning. The article raises the question of whether it is possible in a hierarchical organization and against a backdrop of multiple stories and story fragments, for academics to form and sustain their own Communities of Practice. The reflections of participants captured through a set of questions suggested a predominantly positive response to participation in the curriculum development process. It was noticeable that there was some initial skepticism which was infused with narratives about “the university”, “control” “impingement”, “control” and feelings of being “demoralized” and “alienated”. Alongside some initial scepticism, a recurring sentiment about involvement in the process related to the pleasure of “collaboration”, “collegial sharing” along with “talking to your colleagues openly and constructively” (p. 14). Participants also expressed accomplishment that they had an increased sense of ownership over their programmes. Other positive comments related to an enhanced understanding of the value of a coherent curriculum and “the importance of seeing the bigger picture; not just thinking about one’s own assigned courses”. Contrasted with the perception of a demanding and unhelpful institution, a number of participants expressed their appreciation for the support and guidance offered by the facilitators who were located within the office of a senior university manager. The message seemed to be that many academics are not opposed to the institution being involved in teaching and learning per se, but that the process needs to be dialogic.

In addition, both explicit and implicit traditions about the way things have always been done in higher education and in particular academic disciplines contribute to the tug-of-war narrative regarding the ownership of curriculum in the context of learning and teaching in higher education. Inevitably, when the institution tries to initiate curriculum change, it may be confronted by reluctance or resistance, because of the powerful grip of tradition. The current curriculum review and development process at USP emphasizes both the development of core competencies across a programme and a collective approach to curriculum design. As part of this process, all academics on a programme build their individual courses with a shared understanding of the core knowledge and competencies that they expect their graduates to be able to demonstrate.

Armstrong, Waqailiti and Sarai from the School of Education adopted an auto-ethnographical approach to capture the nuances of their curriculum alignment experiences. Though the School engaged in a collective journey, each of the participant-authors had their own personal voyage and vignettes were used as the vehicle to tell the story of their lived experiences. They explored themes such as their initial thoughts about curriculum alignment, the frustrations that they experienced during the process, the extent to which the facilitation of the curriculum alignment process was supportive and the challenges and successes they experienced in the School. The journey unfolded in their own words and engages with “issues of gender, power relations, leadership and the quality of commitment to education” (p. 53) Underpinned by a close interpretation of Freirean philosophy, the three academics expressed the strong belief that if the curriculum alignment was to have a successful outcome, then student engagement must be central to the design process. Fundamental to the alignment process was the recurring theme of this journal, the development of Communities of Practice and in this case the evolution of these into Communities of Learning for the hundreds of students who flow through that School. That process provided an opportunity for academics to re-interpret curricula and pedagogies which “corresponds to Freire’s conception of the process of knowledge creation” (p. 42).

The three different voices are used in this article, to highlight the reflection of the three female academics, with the article itself becoming “a multi-lectic experience containing several spaces for reflection and engagement at varying levels” (p. 43). The authors chose this approach of action and the reflection on that action because they recognized that when “...knowledge emerges [it is] only through intervention and re-intervention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful enquiry” (p. 42) that we become truly human. This was an important aspect of the process as the collective enquiry that was undertaken corresponds to that Freirean conception of knowledge creation.

The process has been described as both “cumbersome” as well as “a big learning experience”, both seemingly contradictory but both coming from two different perspectives. Ledua explained that “she is a better teacher for having gone through the alignment exercise *and is now content with what she currently teaches compared with her previous practices*” (p. 53).

Vulori felt that through the alignment exercise, she was empowered to “*look at more and exciting ways of making sure that my students enjoy [her] lessons. She reminded us in that process of alignment, “We must remember that we ... need to align ourselves horizontally to the Strategic Plan of the University, to the Faculty and then to the School”*” (p. 54). Unfortunately, Fulori passed away soon after the first set of alignment exercises.

The article from the School of Law shows how contrary the traditional approach to teaching Law is to the skills focus and the collective approach to curriculum development. They noted that the traditional model of law teaching was primarily focused on the transmission of content by experts in a circumscribed area of the Law, underpinned by a belief that Law was an independent discipline and one in which lecturers prepare and deliver their courses in isolation from each other. While there have been considerable reforms in the teaching of Law, the focus on legal rules and content is still paramount, as is the predisposition to design courses in isolation. It is noteworthy that as the team within that School was extended and protracted, the process of designing programme outcomes for the Bachelor of Laws (LLB) programme was observed by the authors to “have been a challenging exercise for the School of Law” (p. 59). They also commented that there was a need to ensure the programme outcomes “covered aspects of all the courses” and that “there was detailed discussion among the academics on what terms to adopt and the sentence structure for the programme outcomes” (p. 62). These comments are interesting in a number of ways. Firstly, they not only suggest

a willingness to engage in the unfamiliar process of collective decision-making about curriculum, but it also sheds light on the extent of the discussion so that all courses will be reflected; this indicates a residual protective approach to individual design of courses. The protracted discussion over choice of words also indicates a discipline's concern with the precision of language. The conclusion of the article by the Law team offers hope that institutional initiatives can be an opportunity for academics to rethink their learning and teaching and may lay the foundations for a deeper engagement by academics in and reflection on teaching and learning by academics. They comment that "the strength of this process was that it offered academics an opportunity to rethink how best to improve teaching and learning and take ownership of the process" (p. 69). For those in positions of institutional management, it also emphasizes the need for institutions to provide space and flexibility for disciplines to interpret and implement curriculum development and to acknowledge unique disciplinary perspectives.

Finally, above all, we thank the Education Discipline formerly known as the School of Education for agreeing to publish this special edition of *Directions* focused on the curriculum alignment experience and all the contributors who have made this special edition possible. We hope that the readers will gain some sense of the relevance of curriculum alignment and that they themselves come to appreciate the nuances involved.

# Changing Minds and Hearts: possibilities and pitfalls of a collaborative curriculum review process

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## Abstract

This paper is a qualitative study that explores the experiences and perceptions of a number of individual academics who have participated in a collaborative curriculum review process at the University of the South Pacific. The research investigation aims to identify academics' impressions of and emotions about the possibilities of the collaborative inquiry process and their perceptions of barriers to the process. In keeping with a narrative inquiry model, the researchers hope to identify some of the background stories that participants bring to the curriculum work. The researchers also investigated whether the dynamics of the working groups changed over time and if any of the components of Communities of Practice (COP) were evident.

Participants were invited to share their impressions of the process in personal reflections which were analysed for recurrent narratives and narrative fragments. These findings were discussed in relation to the research questions, the current quality agenda in academia, discourses of resistance among academic staff, the literature on change management and the concept of COP.

## Introduction and contextual framework

In 2017, as part of its broader strategic agenda, the University of the South Pacific put forward a Curriculum Review and Development Plan which set out a strategy for working with all undergraduate programme teams on their curricula and, eventually, postgraduate programmes. The aim was to work with discipline teams to revisit programme outcomes and rubrics, to align outcomes and assessments at course level with programme and university outcomes, and to review assessments across programmes. Additionally, in the course of this initiative, strategies and tools were to be developed to evaluate student achievement of Programme and University Outcomes which will in turn inform future teaching and learning practices and decisions.

During the first two years of the curriculum review and development, the process was facilitated by a consultant and a USP staff member, both located in the Office of the then Deputy Vice Chancellor, Education, Professor Richard Coll, who had worked collaboratively with programme teams from different disciplines. The intention was that academics in the programmes would gradually assume ownership of the endeavour and commit to ongoing curriculum inquiry. The aspiration was that discipline teams may gradually evolve into self-sustaining Communities of Practice. The facilitators were committed to principles of collaborative inquiry and a significant prompt for this study was to assess whether academics were able to feel connected with the process and distinguish it from what are often perceived as managerial impositions.

Drawing on the organisational change literature (Ford & Ford, 1995; Jabri, Adrian, & Boje, 2008), constructivist assumptions and the recognition of the power of stories in organisations (Boje, 1991), the facilitators used a conversational model that invited participants to bring their narratives and background stories to the table in addition to their academic knowledge and expertise.

The quality agenda has also been a feature of higher education for more than two decades but its impact on academic communities, particularly in specific geographical locations, has not been fully examined. As such, most academics would be familiar with the requirements to comply with programme reviews, student and peer evaluations and expectations of coherent curriculum design. These global trends and emerging systems in higher education have encouraged academics to become more accountable for their teaching practices in ways that would not have been required in previous generations. While quality initiatives have often led to improvements in learning and teaching, there have also been many associated and inter-related challenges. Some of these stem from the manner in which quality initiatives have been implemented as directives from senior management and with little involvement of academic staff members in the thinking and conversations that underpin the change process. Correspondingly, such initiatives can intensify resistance to change from academic staff and widen the gap between management and the academic community in higher education.

The potential tension between compliance-focussed quality imperatives and academics' genuine engagement with improving learning and teaching can be seen in the current curriculum enhancement work at USP that is the focus of this study. This work was initiated against the backdrop of an institution-wide accreditation process. In its bid for accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), USP was required to show evidence of well-designed and aligned curricula and demonstrate that its graduates were achieving the goals stated in its programmes. For those charged with leading this curriculum work, the WSCUC agenda was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the requirements for accreditation provided both the impetus and a framework for curriculum improvement. On the other hand, it was possible that academics' perceptions of the process would be tainted by the view that this was yet another minimalistic quality-focused endeavour that bore little relation to the what they saw as the real concerns of learning and teaching. Inevitably, it is not easy to engage minds and hearts when the work is seen as an institutional imposition.

It is in this environment that this study investigates academics' perceptions of an ongoing curriculum initiative at the University of the South Pacific.

#### Description of the curriculum initiative

The University of the South Pacific introduced a phased Curriculum Review and Development Plan which set out a programme in phase 1 for working with all undergraduate programme teams on their curricula; and, in phase 2, working with postgraduate programmes. The aim was to work with discipline teams to revisit Programme Outcomes and rubrics, to align outcomes and assessments at course level with programme and university outcomes, and to review assessments across programmes. Additionally, in the course of this initiative, strategies and tools will be developed to evaluate student achievement of Programme and University Outcomes which will in turn inform future teaching and learning practices and decisions.

The process of curriculum review and development has been facilitated by a consultant and a USP staff member, both located in the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Education, who have worked collaboratively with programme teams from different disciplines. It is hoped that academics in the programmes will gradually assume ownership of the endeavour and commit to ongoing curriculum inquiry. The aspiration was that discipline teams may gradually evolve into self-sustaining COP. The facilitators are committed to principles of collaborative inquiry and a significant prompt for this study

was to assess whether academics were able to feel connected with the process and distinguish it from what are often perceived as managerial impositions.

As our key research question, we were keen to find out more about the participants' perceptions and feelings about engaging in a process of collaborative inquiry into the curriculum.

Our sub-questions were:

- What narratives and narrative fragments emerged in relation to the process of curriculum review and development? In what ways did these inform the research?
- What background stories do participants bring to the curriculum discussions?
- To what extent did the discipline groups assume ownership of the curriculum inquiry process?
- What are the identifiable features of communities of practice (COP) evident in these discipline groups?

## Literature Review

In working with discipline groups, the goal was to enable these academic communities to claim a sense of ownership in the change process. While there will always be over-arching organisational constraints, it was hoped that these academic groups would acquire some of the attributes of COP.

According to Wenger (2011) "COP are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour" and "COP are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn to do it better as they interact regularly" (p.1). Citing Hara (2001), Rathnappulige and Daniel (2009) suggest the dynamic nature of COP in their choice of wording, stating that the informal networks that constitute COP "support groups of practitioners in developing shared meaning and engaging in knowledge building" (p.2). A helpful refinement in the discussion by Rathnappulige and Daniel is the reminder that in COP there is an assumption that members with different levels of expertise in a particular area learn from each other. While there is no one model of COP, Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) argue that there are three characteristics that are crucial for the development of a COP. Firstly, the shared domain of interest must be present where members learn from each other and value their combined competence. Secondly, the community must be willing and able to interact with each other and learn together as they engage in shared activities. Thirdly, is the shared practice of the community who must be comprised of practitioners participating in a shared discussion much like a *talanoa*, which is indigenous to the South Pacific, and is focussed on group participation through shared experiences, stories and strategies that have been used to address problems that have been persistent. These are helpful criteria for identifying whether and to what extent the programme groups in the current study assume some of the attributes of COP. Furthermore, in discussing COP within organisations, Wenger notes that communities of practice facilitate practitioners in taking collective responsibility for managing knowledge as and when they require it. In such cases, the community of practice functions as a living curriculum that engages participants in a process of collective learning (Wenger & Wenger Trayner, 2015).

However, he also opens up the possibility that the autonomous features and practitioner-orientation of COP may not fit comfortably within hierarchical organisations. This potential tension is implied in the definition by Rathnappulige and Daniel (2009) who talk about COP as "social collectives of experts operating free from the constraints of institutional pressure and administrative frameworks" (p.1).

In investigating academics' perceptions of the curriculum revision process, prevailing academic attitudes, identity concerns and the higher education context need to be considered. Studies suggest that academics may be reluctant to undertake professional development or engage in change processes related to teaching and learning. For example, a South African research study by Quinn (2012), identified four prevalent discourses in the narratives of resistance to academic development which she termed: disciplinary discourses, student/school deficit discourses, skills discourses and performativity discourses. Quinn argued that academics who hold a disciplinary perspective see their academic role as mastering and communicating discipline knowledge and perceive teaching development as unnecessary and irrelevant. In another common narrative that she observed, academics locate teaching and learning problems as stemming from student shortcomings, so that focussing on teaching improvement is seen as bypassing the real problem. Conceptions of teaching also impacted on attitudes to teaching development. Quinn found that some academics saw teaching as mastering a set of mechanical skills that did not need an additional investment of time and energy. The discourse of performativity that Quinn also encountered equated emphasis on teaching improvement with the managerialist culture of contemporary universities which is seen as inimical to genuine intellectual inquiry and therefore something that should be resisted.

In a follow-up study to Quinn's investigation, Deaker, Stein, and Spiller (2016) examined academics' views on teaching and students that they had collated during interviews for their large scale study on teachers' perceptions of student evaluations in New Zealand (Stein, Spiller, Terry, Harris, & Deaker, 2013), to determine whether there was a correspondence with the categories of resistance identified by Quinn. Revisiting the interviews from the New Zealand study, the academics' responses showed elements and fragments of these four discourses in Quinn's study. For example, there was an emotional strain in the comments that a number of academics made about institutional performance expectations and the detrimental effect on their work. There was also a negative component in academics' remarks about students' capabilities which included a broader perception about students' lack of seriousness in relation to their studies (Deaker et al., 2013).

An earlier study by Spiller (2010), based on interviews with heads of schools, revealed the presence of multiple narrative fragments that appear to influence the way academics think about and conduct their professional lives. Included in the stories were multiple references to a managerialist culture which was often contrasted with a perception of a self-managing collaborative academic culture that it was believed had existed in universities in the past. The negativity about managerialism was frequently juxtaposed with references to "academic autonomy" which was also seen to be under threat. Billot (2010) refers to this rift between what is perceived as a managerial culture and the perceptions of academics as "a growing divide between the perceived professional self and that prescribed by the organisation" (p.3).

These discourses of resistance need to be viewed within the context of a broader understanding of the instability of academic identity within the contemporary and rapidly changing higher education environment. As noted by Billot (2010) "Academic professionals are grappling with a fluid identity during continual changes within the tertiary sector" (p. 718). Billot (2010) observes that in this climate of change and uncertainty a "common refrain from academics often includes reference to the manner in which they feel constrained and continually asked to do more than before" (2010, p. 709). The power of contextual forces to constrain specific change initiatives cannot be underestimated as evidenced in the organisational change literature. As argued by Ford, Ford, and McNamara (2002), "resistance to change is a function of the background conversations that are being spoken" (p. 1). According to Ford et al. (2006) the nature of an individual's background stories, which these authors categorise as "complacent", "resigned" or "cynical" will influence the shape of their resistance to change. In the case of the curriculum conversations, the "background conversations" are those that relate to the specific organisation, its history, culture, management and prior educational initiatives,

as well as the features of the contemporary university more broadly. Recognising this densely populated world of background stories, the facilitators undertook to listen to and address some of these narratives as a precursor to the specifics of the curriculum work.

It is against this backdrop of change, uncertainty and contested narratives about academia that academics' perceptions about the curriculum review and development work currently being undertaken at the University of the South Pacific needs to be evaluated. This context also needs to be considered when evaluating the possibilities for developing self-sustaining COP within the disciplines.

## Methodology and Methods

This study is located within an interpretivist paradigm which focuses on understanding the world through the perspectives of the research participants. The research uses the approach of narrative inquiry which seeks to uncover repeated narratives or part narratives that explicitly and implicitly recur in the stories that participants tell of their views and experiences. This particular qualitative approach was chosen because it is argued that narratives can capture both the rational discourses that people choose as well as the more embedded affective dimensions that may be used unconsciously. A narrative inquiry method was also perceived to be useful in identifying possible narrative fragments that underlie the perceptions and feelings of members of the academic community. In keeping with a narrative inquiry approach, analysis of findings will involve identifying common stories or background that recur in participants' narratives as well as repeated vocabulary or metaphorical usage.

Initially, it was decided that some staff reflections would be gathered through conversations and others through written reflections. However, due to time constraints and problems around staff availability, researchers eventually requested written reflections in relation to key questions. An email was sent to participants of the curriculum alignment exercise seeking their reflections in relation to the questions.

Analysis of the findings aimed to identify common stories, narrative fragments and background stories, based on the language used by participants. The discussion is based on the analysis of 8 written reflections that were received from participants.

## Findings and Discussion

### Background Stories

While the sample of reflections was small, it was possible to identify common themes. In relation to academics' perceptions of the curriculum development process, it was apparent that the background stories that academics brought to the discussion influenced their initial perceptions and in some cases, continuing perceptions of this work.

A theme in the reflections on initial perceptions was an element of negativity that appeared to be associated with feelings about institutional control and unhelpful bureaucratic processes. Comments included:

*Some staff...saw the initiative as a way to control their courses (Lecturer A).*

*We were sceptical about the whole business. Is this another example of unnecessary impingement on our research time? (Lecturer F).*

*I wish the university took time to evaluate the pros and cons of new initiatives (Lecturer A).*

*Because of the level of bureaucratic processes associated with many aspects of change, and how people feel overburdened or demoralised, it is obvious that interest in making changes is hampered by these feelings (Lecturer G).*

*I feel frustrated by the slowness of the process and seeing how exhaustion and alienation in relation to the university leads many of my colleagues to feel discouraged (Lecturer G).*

These different comments point to perceptions of unhelpful control and bureaucratic requirements by the institution and corresponding suspicion and reluctance about taking on further curriculum work. From the perspective of this inquiry, the choice of vocabulary such as “control”, “impingement”, “overburdened”, “hampered” and “alienated” communicated that some academics perceive the institution as setting expectations and requirements that are invasive, constraining and disempowering. Equally revealing was the repeated reference to “the university” which appears to be conceptualised as something quite distinct from its academic staff members. At the start of the curriculum initiative, the facilitators were often met with a view that this was to be yet another university compliance exercise that was being imposed on them. The facilitators’ location in the offices of senior management possibly reinforced the notion of institutional imposition.

The language and the sentiments expressed through these comments resonated strongly with a number of themes in the literature, particularly around discourses of negativity. Quinn (2012), for example, identified the discourse of performativity that equated emphasis on teaching improvement with the managerialist culture of contemporary universities which is seen as inimical to genuine intellectual inquiry and therefore something that should be resisted. These attitudes to institutional endeavours also correspond to the views noted by Stein et al (2013) where it was observed that academics’ language showed a high level of emotional content in discussing the detrimental impact of institutional expectations on their work. Similarly, the study by Spiller (2010), based on interviews with academic heads of department, revealed multiple references to a managerialist culture which was perceived as being controlling and contrasted with an aspiration for academic autonomy and a self-regulating collegial academic culture. Billot (2010) noted that perceptions of the institution as constraining and burdensome are part of the common parlance and metaphorical texture of the language of academics in contemporary universities. Correspondingly, it is likely that the stories that USP academics exchange in these respects are an amalgam of internal and external narratives about the deleterious impact of contemporary university management priorities on the quality of academic life and endeavours. It could also be symptomatic of stress due to staff shortages where current staff are expected to be responsible for co-ordinating and teaching courses other than their own. In the instance of the USP curriculum work, the initial perceptions about undertaking the process were clearly influenced by “background stories” which Ford et al. (2002) argue could promote resistance to change.

By contrast with those who equated curriculum work with institutional imposition, one respondent who had been actively involved in leading curriculum work in her academic area as part of a prior initiative came to this round of work with a positive perception. She said:

*I was very excited about the FALE initiative, as I had been interested in curriculum. As I participated in many STAR [Strategic Total Academic Review] workshops, I got “hooked” by the fun of curriculum review. (Lecturer B).*

The other inheritance from the previous curriculum work that this lecturer brought to this initiative from previous curriculum work was the perception that they needed more guidance. She said:

*One thing I always felt was missing from STAR was sustained guidance from a curriculum review expert (Lecturer B).*

The key word in this respondent's comment is "participated" which contrasts markedly with the perceptions of institutional control voiced by the previous set of respondents. Active engagement and participation perhaps meant that organisational storytelling had less impact on her views. Her comment reinforces the importance of inviting, encouraging and sustaining academic involvement in shaping learning and teaching initiatives. This lecturer's comment about guidance, is also an interesting word choice. It captures the notion of help and support as opposed to control and requirements. Together these notions of participation and guidance may be key indicators for promoting a more effective partnership between institutional management and the academic community in contrast with the current perception held by some academics that the institution was a controlling other.

A third category of background stories that appeared to influence participants' initial perceptions of the curriculum development process was the effect of coming fresh to this initiative from a background in practice. The initial perceptions of the two participants who had recently entered academia from practice were quite different from those of the other participants.

In one instance it was simply a case of the unknown:

*Honestly, I did not know what to expect as this was my first curriculum review discussion (Lecturer C).*

Interestingly, as opposed to the discourse of resentment against institutional control voiced by the more seasoned academics, this novice academic had imagined that curriculum work was "something probably suited to senior management".

The second academic who had joined academia after a career as a practitioner reported that she had looked forward to the curriculum discussions:

*I was excited to actively participate in an important area of teaching and learning (Lecturer E).*

Her choice of descriptor 'excited' mirrors that of the academic who had previously engaged fruitfully in curriculum development at the university. The word 'participate' reinforces the notion that this is a key value term for academics.

Perceptions of academics after engaging in curriculum work

For our second question we wanted to explore *the perceptions of academics after engaging in curriculum work*. The comments about the value of the exercise from respondents after participating in the curriculum work were overwhelmingly positive. A number of recurrent themes emerged which have implications for the facilitators and the institution in relation to the conduct of this work. They are exemplified below as: Ownership of the process and building a COP; Support and guidance; and, Learning about curriculum design.

*Ownership of the process and building a COP*

A very important goal for the facilitators was to encourage discipline-focused communities to assume ownership of and long-term engagement with the curriculum inquiry process and this goal was the rationale for the choice of the approach of collaborative conversations with discipline teams. The feedback from respondents provided strong evidence that some academics were moving towards a

recognition of their co-responsibility in the curriculum development process. Comments included the following:

*I feel that I now have much more in-depth engagement with curriculum review (Lecturer B).*

*The curriculum discussions have encouraged more staff within the discipline to reflect on ways in which our curriculum could be better aligned (Lecturer D).*

*It was a collaborative exercise between the experts in the subject matter and experts in education (Lecturer F).*

*The collaborative nature of these curriculum discussions has been very important in supporting team building and collegiality in the disciplines and creating cross-disciplinary conversations (Lecturer G).*

*Through sustained conversation and collaboration and collegial sharing, all Schools began to develop a sense of ownership. It has been simply amazing to witness their passion for it (Lecturer B).*

*Will ensure that all units will adhere to the PGOs and USP GOs and will not be changed at the whim of any one person, it will require participation and collaboration of all team members (Lecturer E).*

These comments indicated a sense of involvement and ownership in words such as “*engagement*”, “*our curriculum*”, “*ownership*”, but equally significant are all the words suggesting collective involvement and responsibility, “*team building*” and “*collegiality*”. These comments resonated with participants’ feelings of satisfaction about working as a team and, when juxtaposed with some other pertinent feedback comments, indicate that the curriculum development conversations with programmes helped to forge some of the features of COP. Relevant comments in this respect included the following:

*It is about talking to your colleagues openly and constructively because together you are shaping your students’ learning (Lecturer C).*

*This gives us the opportunity to open our personal teaching life to others to have a look at and comment (Lecturer H).*

*The workshop was the first time the journalism team sat and looked at those elements in a focussed and critical manner (Lecturer F).*

*To subject my L & T work to greater and more regular peer review (Lecturer G).*

These comments, particularly when they are understood in conjunction with the numerous appreciative statements about collaboration, indicate that the beginnings of some of the features of COP are appearing in these programme groups. The language suggests the presence of key attributes of COPs as identified by Wenger: “a shared domain of interest”, “members interact, help each other and share information” and “develop a shared repertoire of resources” (2011, p. 1). The first two of these attributes are clearly apparent from these comments. While the notion of resource development is not explicitly stated in respondents’ comments, there is a recognition of the value of one’s peers as an important resource in inquiry into teaching and learning matters.

There are some question marks about the potential for developing authentic COP within the organisational context of the university. While respondents' comments show participants' willingness "to take shared responsibility for managing the knowledge that they need" (Wenger, 2011, p. 1) there is the challenging question of whether genuine COP are compatible with the requirements, processes and culture of the organisation. These concerns emerged in the comments of some participants:

*However, I wish the university took time to evaluate the pros and cons of new initiatives, and think through the ramifications for students and staff (Lecturer A).*

*However, because of the level of bureaucratic processes associated with many aspects of change, and how people feel overburdened or demoralised, it is obvious that interest in making change is hampered by these feelings. I feel frustrated by the slowness of the process and seeing how exhaustion and feelings of alienation in relation to the university leads many of my colleagues to feel discouraged (Lecturer G).*

*We need more time and institutional support to let us imagine, conceive and implement curriculum revision (Lecturer A).*

This feedback suggests that while respondents appreciated the conversational spaces that were created to look at the curriculum, some feel that the university as a whole has to open up its spaces and processes more generally to realise the full potential and possibilities of the collaborative curriculum inquiry undertaken by programme teams.

One of the challenges is the perception of the university as an entity that is distinct from the communities of academics which is in keeping with the international literature on academics' resistance to a managerialist culture (Billot, 2010). These comments and the divide between academics and management raise the question of whether genuine COPs are possible in the current university organisational culture. If we use Rathnappulige and Daniel's (2009) definition of "social collectives of experts operating free from the constraints of institutional pressure and administrative frameworks" (p. 6), then the answer must be that these programme teams can only be approximations of COPS.

Furthermore, a few comments from respondents suggest that not all programme members embraced the curriculum inquiry process:

*The only aspect that could have been improved was the full prior buy-in of the participants (Lecturer D).*

*There may still be some cynicism about such requirements and processes within the school (Lecturer D).*

Observations like these are reminders that the curriculum initiative is ultimately an institutional one and so may always be perceived by some as being tainted. The potential of what is ultimately an institutionally-sanctioned conversational forum to evolve into an autonomous learning community may be limited by the institutional ownership of the original initiative.

### Support and guidance

While suspicion and doubt about institutional norms, processes and imperatives remain, a counter narrative also emerged in the feedback which was the perception of the value of support from appropriate people in the institution. The comments that are a reflection of this are identified below:

*One thing that I always felt was missing from STAR was sustained guidance from a curriculum review expert. We are aware that we were lay persons trying to guide/train other lay persons. Similarly, we felt that the curriculum review work we had done needed to be reviewed by someone with appropriate expertise (Lecturer D).*

*So I was happy to be involved in a collaborative process, with support from the DVCLTSS's Office and from the faculty (Lecturer D).*

*My perceptions are very positive. Dorothy and Sujlesh have provided considerable administrative support (Lecturer D).*

*The value of dedicated academic and administrative units towards important tasks such as curriculum development and alignment (Lecturer D).*

*The work we have conducted with Dorothy and Sujlesh would never have happened to such a high standard without their prompting, support and guided discussion (Lecturer D).*

In terms of the gap between academics' perceptions and institutional management which appear to be a feature of the contemporary university (Billot, 2010), it is encouraging to see these comments that recognise the potential for partnership with institutional goals and those that represent them.

### Learning about curriculum design

The previous findings capture participants' emotions and perceptions about involvement in the curriculum review process, with themes of initial mistrust especially in relation to the university, an increasing sense of satisfaction in participation and collegial conversations and appreciation of the support provided for these conversations. The final theme that was identified in the reflections was the usefulness of learning about the curriculum design process and its relevance for their own ongoing process of curriculum inquiry. In particular, respondents expressed a strengthened understanding of the significance and value of curriculum coherence. Comments included:

*The value and importance of a coherent curriculum (seeing the big picture)  
It is about reflecting on and reimagining a whole curriculum in relation to the learning experience it offers students (Lecturer A).*

*It is about ensuring that individual courses coherently and effectively function so that the programme as a whole 'does exactly what it says on the tin' (Lecturer A).*

*We could view the courses in a more holistic manner. The links and connections became clearer, as did the gaps (Lecturer F).*

*But the real effect can be seen at the level of the programme as a whole, with newly adjusted course learning outcomes adding to a programme that is more than the sum of its parts (Lecturer D).*

*The process has given me the opportunity and the ability to see both the macro and micro points of curriculum design (Lecturer A).*

*Understanding how the system works was one of the most significant for me, in terms of witnessing the stages of learning for the students in a specialised field, seeing the progressive stages and how they are aligned to the institution's core objectives and outcomes (Lecturer C).*

*The importance of seeing the bigger picture: not just thinking about one's own assigned courses, but how to adjust the teaching of those courses so as to complement a broader learning process across the discipline (Lecturer D).*

The repeated reference to the importance of understanding the coherence of a programme and the systematic and inter-related design of courses to work towards programme goals was gratifying feedback for the facilitators. It was the core learning outcome that the facilitators wanted both in itself and because it gave academics the vision and the tools for ongoing inquiry into their decision-making about teaching, learning and assessment. It was also satisfying because these comments indicate that these respondents were able to evaluate the initiative's intrinsic merits in a way that was free of the inherited and entangling current narratives about the institution.

## Reflections for Future Practice

This study has shown that a model of partnership and collaborative conversations between facilitators and academic programme teams can promote genuine engagement of academic staff in curriculum work. At the same time, initial resistance was identified and it is clear that background stories, especially in relation to a demanding and constraining managerialist institutional culture, promote resistance and negativity. The findings are also limited by the size of the sample of reflections and that the work with programmes has only thus far been completed with selected academic disciplines. While the feedback showed encouraging indicators of feelings of ownership and empowerment in the comments of respondents, it was recognised that there may be limits to the potential of these networks within an institutional framework. The survival and effectiveness of these groups and their work still need to be tested in relation to the current models of management. It was suggested that while programme groups displayed some significant aspects of COP, such communities may be difficult to realise within the framework of institutional requirements. Initiatives such as the current one may go some way to restoring academics' sense of engagement with decision-making in the university, but change is also required from university management in terms of how they involve the academic community. Strong sentiments that emerged were the enjoyment of participation and working collectively. There was recognition that the institution could play a supportive role. A revitalisation of such sentiments needs to be widespread in institutions to promote a more productive relationship with the institution. As argued by Parker (2002), it is probably impossible to recreate the real or imagined university culture of the past, but academics need to do more than simply rebut the dictates of current institutional expectations. Rebuttal alone, he suggests, may condemn academics "to the role of boxer on the ropes-gloves and elbows up while fending off the head shots, lessening the pain, but scoring no points" (p. 613).

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# Foregrounding Pacific Epistemologies in Curriculum Review: Exercising Educator Agency in a Process of Institutional Change

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## Abstract

In this paper, we will reflect on our experiences relating to two major processes of transformation in the Sociology programme: 1) curriculum alignment and 2) online course conversion. Our curriculum review journey began in 2011 with the Strategic Total Academic Review (STAR) project. Three years later, as we continued to develop and review our curriculum, we were directed by the University to begin converting our courses to an online delivery format. The two coinciding processes not only resulted in an overhaul of our curriculum but also entailed a re-structuring and re-imagining of our learning and teaching practices. While curriculum alignment required us to be more explicit and strategic about designing student learning outcomes and activities, online conversion challenged us to do this in a completely new format, using new technologies. This was a demanding process, but we also gained valuable experience. In particular, while the effectiveness of peer learning and interaction on an online learning platform has been argued by educational researchers worldwide, in the Pacific context, the positioning of learning as a dialogic process of collective knowledge construction takes on added significance. As we attempted to align learning outcomes with online learning activities, our major goal was to weld the interactive potentials of online educational technologies with a culturally relevant learning process informed by Pacific epistemologies. The paper will focus on this particular aspect of our curriculum transformation process: our search for Pacific-style online learning through weaving together of curriculum alignment, online pedagogy and Pacific epistemologies.

## Introduction

Curriculum reform has received increasing attention in higher education in recent years, in response to multiple imperatives, including a growing need to provide “learners with abilities of learning new skills and knowledge for effective living in the midst of rapid technological change” (Olibie, 2013, p.161). For instance, many countries have introduced national qualifications frameworks, a shift to learning outcomes-based curriculum design, and a move from subject-specific to more generic curriculum criteria (Olibie, 2013). Among such prominent trends is an emphasis on curriculum alignment (Biggs, 1999, 2014; International Bureau of Education, n.d.; Stabback, 2016), which links objectives and assessments; objectives and instructional activities and materials; and assessments and instructional activities and materials (Anderson, 2002). As Watermeyer (2012, p. 8) notes, “alignment between the curriculum, instruction and assessment is ... pre-conditional to any coherent and consistent educational strategy and in fulfilling the aim of providing every student with the opportunity to learn and fairly evidence their achievements.” Accordingly, Lezotte (2002) identifies curriculum alignment as the most significant ‘high-yield strategy’ in enhancing student learning experience and outcomes. Reflecting this global trend, the University of the South Pacific (USP) has been undertaking a number of curriculum review and development initiatives including strengthening curriculum alignment. While most academic staff were not aware of the term ‘curriculum alignment’

at the time, USP began curriculum development work in 2010 with its STAR project, aligning graduate outcomes, course learning outcomes and assessments.

This institutional curriculum review project was soon followed by another major shift in 2014, USP began to move its undergraduate courses to an online delivery format. This again parallels a global trend “toward Information and Communications Technology ... blending a milieu of curriculum that caters to the needs of learners worldwide” (Olibie, 2013, p. 162). In the United States, for instance, the number of students taking online courses has reached 5.8 million, indicating a consistent growth for the last 13 years (Online Learning Consortium, 2016). Online learning has become, in Natalier and Clarke’s words, “a central element of contemporary universities” (2015, p. 62). At USP, the shift to online learning began with the *2013-2018 Strategic Plan* targeting 30% of its undergraduate courses for online conversion. At the time of writing of this paper, the University is offering 273 online courses, set to meet the Strategic Plan target by the end of 2018 with 16 undergraduate single major programmes delivered in an online mode (Yusuf, personal communication, 2018).

## Sociology’s Experience of Curriculum Transformation: Neo-Managerial Standardisation or Reflexive Pedagogical Practice?

The authors’ programme, Sociology, has been deeply involved in these two transformational processes at USP. As expected in most institutionally-initiated changes, the STAR project was met with a degree of resistance and scepticism among academic staff. But the School of Social Sciences, to which Sociology belongs, had a different approach, possibly due to the commitment and minimal turnover of its STAR Trainers (selected academic staff trained to facilitate curriculum review at the School and programme levels). The School has organised yearly workshops and periodical monitoring, and as a result made greater progress than most other Schools. In 2018, as the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education embarked on a Faculty-wide curriculum review and development initiative, Sociology, along with the rest of the Social Science disciplines, was engaging in further curriculum revision, focusing especially on assessment activities and rubrics, and on the evaluation of student achievement of graduate outcomes.

Sociology was also among the selected programmes that spearheaded the University’s online course conversion in 2014. In common with academic staff response to online teaching internationally (Allen et al., 2012), USP’s decision to shift towards online learning prompted mixed staff reactions. Having had substantial engagement with pedagogical discourses of curriculum review, however, the Sociology staff were better prepared than many others to undertake online course conversion in a meaningful and reflexive manner. The team has to date moved all of the undergraduate Sociology courses online.

Thus, USP has implemented major curriculum reforms to keep abreast of international higher education trends and to enhance students’ learning experience, with Sociology as a prominent participant in these processes. But an important question that must be asked by and of Pacific island educators in the context of such momentous change is: ‘Is all this curriculum revision a facet of a globalising process of homogenisation and rationalisation of education, emanating from the neoliberal logic of new managerialism (Kohlmeyer & Ahmed, 2018; Natalier & Clarke, 2015); or does curriculum review offer new scope and opportunities for critical reflection on and exploration of our own, Pacific style of learning?’

While we are fully cognizant of the former view as critical sociologists and need to remain mindful about potential dangers, we believe that the incorporation of international curricular trends or digital technologies is not in itself necessarily repressive or transformative; it is the manner in which such

change is navigated, steered and embodied on the ground that has significant pedagogical and social consequences. The University's decision to undertake institution-wide curriculum review may be outside the control of individual staff members and involve a degree of institutional control over day-to-day learning and teaching practices; yet there is also scope for educator agency to shape the implementation of the change in a manner that enables ongoing pursuit of and debate on pedagogy and learning in the Pacific. We believe such space for agency has been made possible partly by the fact that institutional change agents at USP (most importantly the University's Assessment Coordinator) have positioned curriculum review as a broad 'framework' for educator accountability and reflexive practice rather than a neo-managerial straitjacket or a bureaucratic box-ticking exercise. Hence, our approach to curriculum review has been to actively claim it as a medium of stocktaking, scrutinising and re-imagining our own practices as Pacific island educators.

In this paper, we present reflections on our attempt to appropriate an institutionally-initiated change process as an opportunity for critical reflection and innovation in an ongoing journey of search for a Pacific style of learning. The process not only resulted in an overhaul of our curriculum but also entailed a re-structuring and re-conceptualisation of our learning and teaching practices. While curriculum alignment required us to be much more explicit and strategic about designing and communicating student learning outcomes/activities, online conversion challenged us to do this in a completely new format, using new technologies. This was a demanding and at times daunting process, but we also gained valuable experiences and lessons. We discuss these in relation to two undergraduate Sociology courses, *SO200: Modern Social Theory* and *SO100: Themes and Perspectives in Sociology*.

### Curriculum Review the Pacific Way: Embedding 'Pacific Consciousness'

We begin by noting that USP's curriculum review work has always taken cognizance of Pacific cultural heritage. One of the University's seven graduate outcomes, originally developed by the STAR Trainers in 2011, is Pacific Consciousness: 'Graduates will recognise the cultural heritage and diversity of Pacific societies for sustainable development in a contemporary environment' (USP, 2017). It has three criteria: '1. respect for the cultural heritage and diversity of Pacific societies; 2. relationship between one's culture and one's position in the world; and 3. integration of traditional and contemporary practices to sustain Pacific societies.'

Two observations relating to this unique graduate outcome merit discussion. First, this graduate outcome suggests that curriculum review is not about mere transposition of learning outcomes from Western universities but a pedagogical practice that crystallises and re-examines a living curriculum with all its complexities, necessarily encompassing both endogenous heritage and new knowledge and technologies. Indeed, the second and third criteria remind us of the intricate interconnectivity between the Pacific and the global and warn against reductive binarism. Even if curriculum alignment is intended as a structural, Western imposition on local educational contexts, it can never eradicate space for local agency. The fact that academic staff autonomously developed this graduate outcome is primary evidence of the ability of local agents to respond creatively and meaningfully to and impact on structural forces.

Secondly, the graduate outcome challenges USP academic staff to embed such 'consciousness' tangibly and effectively in student learning experience and outcomes. While an immediate response would be to integrate Pacific-relevant learning 'content', which Sociology courses have always done given the nature of the discipline, our sustained engagement with curriculum review spurred us on to consider the 'form' (i.e., mode) of learning as a strategy for course alignment with Pacific Consciousness. That is, we began to contemplate ways of bringing into our courses Pacific ways of

knowing and learning – i.e., Pacific epistemologies – by exploring the pedagogical possibilities offered by online technologies.

Despite their great diversity and fluidity, Pacific communities share commonalities in their ways of knowing, which allows us to speak of ‘Pacific epistemologies’ (Huffer & Qalo, 2004). Discussions of embodying Pacific epistemologies in education are by no means new. There is a long history of Pacific island educational scholars integrating Pacific epistemologies into formal education (e.g., Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Thaman, 1993, 2003; 'Otunuku et al., 2014) in response to calls for drawing “from our native or indigenous cultures ways of reconfiguring classroom organisation and pedagogical practices” (Gegeo, 2001, p. 180). Engaging with the graduate outcomes and online pedagogy prompted us as sociologists to pay closer attention to the project Pacific island educational scholars have long been pursuing. We thus embarked on what Forsey et al. (2013, p. 474) describe as “the re-invention of the sociology class” in the context of curriculum review and online course conversion. As we attempted to align graduate outcomes with online learning activities, we sought to weld the interactive potentials of online educational technologies with a culturally relevant learning process informed by Pacific epistemologies.

### Talanoa-informed Peer Learning: Fostering ‘Online Togetherness’ in SO200

When Yoko, the SO200 coordinator, was confronted with the prospect of converting her course to an online mode in 2014, she was concerned. Her first thought was that it was going to deprive her and the students of all meaningful interaction. The image she had of online learning was of faceless students scattered across cyberspace, with nothing to link them but some impersonal and mysterious digital network. Yet, as she learnt more about online learning with the assistance of Centre for Flexible Learning (CFL) staff, it became clear that new technologies in fact presented possibilities of enhancing student-lecturer and student-student interaction in an innovative manner.

This was particularly important in Yoko’s attempt to align the course with Pacific Consciousness (and the graduate outcome of Teamwork). One of her course learning outcomes was: ‘Apply modern social theories, as a general frame of reference, to analysis of issues and problems of relevance to contemporary Pacific island societies,’ which was meant to be aligned with Pacific Consciousness as well as with the Sociology programme graduate outcomes, especially ‘Social Analysis: Critically analyse social behaviour, practices and issues of relevance to Pacific island societies and cultures by applying the basic principles of sociological thinking, theories and concepts.’ Thus, while the course was about modern social theories, the majority of which are cultural products of the modern West, it was specifically intended to facilitate students to engage with these in a way directly relevant and meaningful in Pacific island contexts. Aligning learning activities and assessments authentically with Pacific Consciousness, beyond peppering learning outcomes with the word ‘Pacific’ or simply asking students to give examples from the region in their essays, was key to achieving this goal. Holistic course alignment with Pacific Consciousness required the lecturer to explore ways of encouraging students not only to employ modern social theories to analyse Pacific island social issues (i.e., content), but also do so in a process of learning embedded in Pacific epistemologies (i.e., mode). While the effectiveness of peer learning and interaction on an online learning platform has been argued by educational researchers worldwide (e.g., Kang and Im, 2013; McInerney & Roberts, 2004; Sher, 2009), in the Pacific context, the positioning of learning as a dialogic process of collective knowledge construction takes on added significance. *Talanoa* in Pacific island contexts entails “engaging in dialogue with or telling stories to each other ... [without] concealment of the inner feelings and experiences that resonate in our hearts and minds” (Halapua, 2008, p. 1). It may also be described as a process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue (United Nations, 2018) where participants freely exchange and collectively explore knowledge claims by mobilising communicative reason (Habermas, 1984) and cultural resources such as indigenous values of

“empathy, respect, love and humility” (Farrelly & Naibobo-Baba, 2012, p. 1). *Talanoa* constructs “knowledge about our social identities, extended families, our villages, our ethnic and tribal communities, our religious beliefs and our moral, economic, and political interests” and enables mutual respect for and learning from each other (Halapua, 2008, p. 1). Interaction and peer learning is, then, critical to Pacific ways of knowledge construction.

How do we as educators of Sociology infuse into online learning the spirit and principles of *talanoa*? A tentative model that Yoko arrived at after consultation with CFL staff was to recreate an entire tutorial classroom on Moodle. Students were organised into virtual tutorial groups, with each group given their own virtual tutorial room where they undertook group work, just as they would in a face-to-face class, to apply modern social theories to Pacific island contexts or to critique them from Pacific island standpoints. Yoko would occasionally visit each tutorial room to join their discussion, just as she would in a face-to-face tutorial session. This way, Moodle was to be transformed into a virtual space for small group interaction, rather than a mere repository of documents and information. It must be noted that, whereas *talanoa* presupposes an open agenda, based on the premise that the participants “can and ought to shape and re-shape their own ‘agendas’ during, and not prior to, their actual dialogic interaction with each other” (Halapua, 2008, p. 2), a tutorial does impose a broad framework and agenda for discussion: in this case, students were specifically asked to explore and contextualise modern social theories with Pacific island viewpoints and insights. Nevertheless, the tutorial room, which was only accessible to group members and the lecturer, was designed to encourage informal, open talk, only loosely guided by prescribed topics. Students were encouraged not only to discuss theories, but also to engage in but small talk, socialise, share video links in order to get to know each other personally and develop a group identity.

The first delivery of the course in 2015 following online conversion indicated the considerable potential, as well as challenges, of online learning. One of the greatest challenges was student scepticism towards online learning at USP, not only academic staff but also many students struggled to accommodate immediately the new format, which may be at least in part attributed to strong oral traditions in the region (see, e.g., Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001). One way of responding to this challenge was to respect the *talanoa* spirit of honest and open sharing of thoughts and feelings. The lecturer’s candid discussion of her own apprehension and hopes for online learning, as well as invitation for students to share their thoughts, helped position the shift to online learning as a collective journey for the lecturer and students to navigate together.

In addition to the general apprehension about online learning, it was also obvious that not all students were keen to speak in classroom settings, face-to-face or online. While this is an ongoing challenge regardless of course delivery mode, a strategy was developed by CFL staff to address it in the virtual tutorial: to have rotating leaders in each group. Each group had a team leader (who facilitated group discussion) and a collator/poster (who summarised the discussion and posted it on Moodle to share with the rest of the class) in each unit. These roles were rotated through the semester so each student played a leadership role at least once. This proved to be a useful mechanism for facilitating students to both give and receive peer support and guidance. The dynamic of the groups in fact developed to a point where a process of ‘shared leadership’ (Bergman et.al, 2012) and reciprocal learning unfolded. The students who were no longer team leaders or collator/posters continued to provide support to the others. They would post friendly supportive messages to quiet or absent members. If a student asked where to find a reading on Moodle or how to make sense of a theoretical concept, another student would offer help even before the lecturer could.

In this way, the course gradually developed into a collective project. Many students would interact and chat informally on Moodle, often daily, fostering a sense of community. In his joint presentation with Yoko at a University-wide learning and teaching forum, Alphonse Botu, a student in this class,

described the sense of connection the class developed over the semester as ‘*online togetherness*’ (Botu, 2016). Far removed from the initial image Yoko had of students studying at their own computer, in isolation and faceless in vast cyberspace, many of her students were learning, communicating, and growing together – that is, engaging in *talanoa*, a process of collective knowledge construction – in the virtual tutorial room. It seemed that the course began to embody Pacific Consciousness in an organic welding of the Pacific and the global in both content and form: that is, a welding of Pacific knowledges and modern social theories, as well as Pacific epistemologies and global digital technologies.

The students’ positive learning experience translated into their improved outcomes. In the first year of delivery, the course pass rate jumped from 70% of the previous year to 85%, A+ and A grades from 16% to 20%, and B+ and B grades from 18% to 33%. Student feedback, collected informally on Moodle, points to the significance of interaction in learning:

*The things I enjoyed most in the course were the on-line activities. By constantly interacting with fellow course mates on-line, I was able to know others better and to develop a sense of appreciation and respect for each and everyone in the course.*

*I really enjoyed studying modern social theories (something I thought would never be possible). I really enjoyed the online activities. And I agree with [another student] on the part where everyone was willing to help each other out.*

It must be noted that not all students had the same experience in the course. Students’ prior information literacy skills, among other things, appeared to make a major impact on their overall experience of the online activities. Poor internet connectivity also remains an obstacle for many students in the region. Moreover, reaching out to every student and effectively meeting their needs is and will always be an unfinished task. Nevertheless, the first delivery of the converted course showed that it is possible to try to foster ‘online togetherness’ among students and lecturers as a step towards infusing the values and principles of *talanoa* into online learning. It showed that seeking a Pacific style of online learning is an immensely meaningful and rewarding, if also challenging and never-ending, project. Curriculum review provided a crucial pedagogical framework for this project, by challenging the lecturer to make her own assumptions, intentions and practices of learning and teaching explicit, and furthermore, to re-imagine them in a critical, ambitious, and creative way.

## SO100: *Talanoa* as a Pedagogical Tool: Thinking Right Side Up Again?<sup>1</sup>

The experiences of students in SO100, as well as the lecturers (Tui and Andreas), are somewhat more ambivalent than those of Yoko and her students in SO200. The fact that most students in this introductory Sociology course were first-year students who experienced online learning for the first time in their lives provided its unique set of challenges. For instance, Tui and Andreas came across students who were not at all familiar with ICT, let alone its immense possibilities as a learning tool. The feeling of being suddenly plunged into the deep end of the pool applied to both students and the lecturers. The self-doubts in relation to online pedagogy as an alternative for the conventional mode of teaching and learning was never far from the surface. Indeed, the loss of face-to-face interaction between educators and students and among students themselves brought with it a new set of considerations: how do we, as educators, continue to provide quality education to our students without the form of interaction that we were all used to? Furthermore, how do we continue to exert

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<sup>1</sup> This is animated by Huffer, E., and R. Qalo. 2004. Have We Been Thinking Upside-Down? The Contemporary Emergence of Pacific Theoretical Thought. *The Contemporary Pacific* 16 (1): 87-116.

the control that we used to have in the classrooms where students know the rules of engagement well?

As Pacific islanders with histories anchored in oral traditions, the new online delivery format, coupled with curriculum review, required the lecturers to start rethinking their 'position' as educators away from the hierarchical order that traditionally has been the norm. Gone are the days where sociological precepts are understood exclusively from the lecturer's interpretation of academic texts and the way these interpretations are products of the transcendentalist approaches of Western educational models (Thaman, 2003). It dawned on Tui and Andreas that they needed to develop their pedagogical skills further not only to teach those who are willing to be taught, but also, to engage meaningfully with those who are reticent to engage with the new approach.

The journey, as noted above, has not been without its own set of challenges. As a structural imperative, this pedagogical shift within the area of online education at USP required a certain amount of readjustments, on the part of staff and students, in the areas of learning and teaching. The fear that students would suddenly fall off the electronic grid was to become a daily challenge due to reasons ranging from internet connectivity problems in the smaller, regional campuses to natural reticence by students. This is often compounded by a refusal by some to engage in a learning platform other than face-to-face. Indeed, some of the regional students could not hide their dismay when they found, upon their arrival to Laucala Campus, that they would be taking their courses online after all. As a consequence, virtual learning spaces were, at first, regarded with scepticism by students. The palpable feeling that the lack of face-to-face interaction could lead to academic solipsism hence severing the sense of community that is often engendered by face-to-face tutorial rooms was not very far away from the minds of students and staff alike.

The dynamics of online teaching and learning, in relation to the introductory course in Sociology, gradually took shape from these considerations, which was facilitated by a broader process of curriculum alignment. SO100, like SO200, was intended to be aligned with the graduate outcome of Pacific Consciousness, with one of its course learning outcomes ('Use the sociological perspective or imagination to interpret or describe social phenomena, such as racism, sexism, and deviance') expecting students to embody tangibly sociological thinking in Pacific societal contexts. Reviewing the alignment between these learning outcomes and course learning activities challenged Tui and Andreas to scrutinise critically whether the previous teacher-driven learning process, as comfortable as they (and the students) were with it, truly cultivated the desired Pacific-centred outcome. It challenged them to ask: how best do Pacific island students learn to appropriate sociological tools as their own to understand Pacific social phenomena? Do teacher-led learning activities effectively achieve such an outcome? It is in the course of such critical scrutiny that Tui and Andreas transformed the teacher-driven learning process into one where students were at the helm in discussing and sharing of ideas about sociological theories and themes in relation to their own society and cultural heritage. At the frontier of these contemplations was a concerted effort, on their part, to blend Pacific ways of *knowing* and *being* with the new requirements surrounding curriculum alignment as well as online pedagogical matrices.

New opportunities were thus identified as a potential way forward to teaching and learning in a context defined by Oceanic sensibilities. For students whose natural dispositions are to *talanoa* about everything in their respective life-worlds, the synchronous online chatrooms and asynchronous online discussion spaces within Moodle were arranged in such a way that it closely resonates with the way they have been connecting with each other within their specific cultural milieu that make up 'our sea of islands' (Hau'ofa, 1993). Nabobo-Baba (2008) notes that in the Fijian context, *talanoa* is a dialogic process that can assume a myriad of forms. These range from open-ended discussions within a community of interlocutors who share the same interests to close-ended ones with a storyteller and

his or her audience. Whatever form one may choose, *talanoa*, with its insistence on some form of dialogic symmetry is still, essentially, a move away from a vertical dictatorial formal classroom setting towards a more horizontal dialogical backdrop, in the context of learning, where both educators and students learn and teach. Moreover, from an Oceanic viewpoint, learning through *talanoa* allows emotional motivations to be also counted as legitimate drivers of the dialogic process (Farely and Nabobo-Baba, 2008). While strategies for such a horizontal dialogic process is nothing new per se and have been developed for face-to-face settings even in large classrooms, it was the switch to online teaching and curriculum alignment that motivated us to consider and implement ways of building dialogue and a sense of community in the new online classroom, which we may not have been prompted to do otherwise.

The new broad-based inclusive learning approach that had replaced the specific and comparatively rigid style of the face-to-face classroom paved the way for more in-depth discussions on topical issues affecting the region. Instead of bringing their experiences with them to share in tutorial rooms located at Laucala Campus, students across the region can now for the first time, share experiences via Moodle, while remaining physically and emotionally within their own specific contexts. Indeed, *talanoa* as a process of both teaching and learning began to gain momentum in virtual chat spaces and discussion forums once students got over their initial reticence with engaging online, creating a sense of community in the virtual space offered through Moodle. Of course, as educators, Tui and Andreas kept a keen eye on the proceedings and occasionally would 'rope them in' if they felt that the overall direction of the discussion was veering from the learning outcomes. Additionally, they would drive home reminders that the *talanoa* process must be infused with relevant themes gleaned from their weekly readings. This is to ensure that while learning follows the cognitive processes occurring within a hermeneutic circle, clear learning outcomes dictate the tenor as well as the substance of online discussions (Gadamer, 1973).

The results from the first online offering of the course in 2015 were encouraging. For instance, the number of students who did extremely well almost doubled from the previous year when SO100 had been offered as a face-to-face course with a print component for regional students. Furthermore, the distribution of these high-performing students were spread right across the region. This is a far cry from the time when it was assumed that only Laucala students, due to their face-to-face contact with their lecturers, can be expected to do well in the course. The overall pass rate in 2015, however, dipped slightly from 81% to 79%. This was attributed, at the time, to low computer literacy levels amongst new students as well as internet connectivity problems in the region.

The positive indications from SO100 students in the deployment of *talanoa* as an online pedagogical tool seems to suggest that we may have unearthed a bridge between online pedagogies based on curriculum alignment, course learning outcomes and assessment rubrics with Pacific cognitive frameworks. For instance, it has introduced an egalitarian element to high quality tertiary learning that sits more comfortably with our ways of knowing and being, at least in this part of the world. This new development makes us wonder if we are on the verge of thinking right side up again as far as teaching and learning at USP is concerned (Huffer & Qalo, 2004).

We must note that this optimism was somewhat dampened in the following semesters. Rising failure rates in this course since its first online delivery highlighted the need for greater circumspection in designing an effective online platform. It became clear to Tui and Andreas that their curriculum review journey had just started and needed to be understood as a dynamic and continuous process, not least to explore fault-lines from which a more effective integration of online learning and Pacific epistemologies could emerge. Tui and Andreas have been critically asking themselves (again): Are our teaching and learning activities and assessments tangibly aligned with Pacific-centred outcomes? Are we effectively capitalising on the pedagogical potentials of online technologies to maximise this

alignment? It is only through continuously asking these critical questions and reflecting on our own teaching and learning practices that we will begin to make meaningful contributions to Pacific educators' long-standing project of melding Pacific epistemologies with formal education in the age of globalisation and digitalisation.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have presented reflections on our experience of curriculum alignment and online course conversion, which has resulted in major changes in our curriculum since 2011. Our discussion has focused on a particular aspect of our experience: our search for Pacific-style online learning through weaving together of curriculum alignment, online pedagogy and Pacific epistemologies. Sociology is a discipline whose core interest is in understanding the complexities and dynamics of societies, cultures and communities. Hence our learning content has always been 'Pacific conscious' in that our theories, readings, and analyses have always placed primary importance on their relevance to the region. But our engagement with curriculum alignment over the past few years has challenged us to scrutinise and innovate the ways in which students are facilitated to cultivate their Pacific Consciousness. Furthermore, the process of online conversion has required us to do this in a new environment with new technologies, which has presented new possibilities as well as challenges.

In both SO100 and SO200, this journey has made us explore ways of infusing the values, principles of practices of *talanoa* into our virtual classrooms. In SO100, the explorations culminated in online chat rooms and discussion forums as a Pacific online pedagogical tool, designed and facilitated in a dialogic manner resonant with Pacific ways of knowing and being. SO200 sought to create such a space in the form of virtual tutorials as a site of collective knowledge production, which has fostered peer learning and a sense of 'online togetherness' among students and the lecturer. Intersecting both cases is our search of ways to embody Pacific epistemologies in the online classroom with the opportunities offered by digital technologies. It is an ongoing journey, instigated by curriculum review and bound to bring further transformations in our courses in the future.

In closing, we return to the question we asked at the outset about the nature of curriculum review. Does curriculum review inhibit or enable the task identified by Nabobo-Baba (2006, p. 82) for the region: "a need for each Pacific nation to define ... and to reconceptualise its own curriculum in terms of its own unique social context"? Our experience suggests that the answer depends critically on our will and ability to appropriate an institutionally-initiated change process as an opportunity for ongoing re-examination and re-imagining of our learning and teaching practices as Pacific island educators. In short, it depends on our commitment as educators to exercising our agency to navigate structural forces of change in the interest of Pacific island students and communities.

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# Mapping the curriculum or doing curriculum mapping? A view from Linguistics and Languages

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## Abstract

This article uses examples from three language programmes to discuss different points in a programme's lifecycle at which it is valuable to map the curriculum. Firstly, when a new programme is proposed, it is obviously important to determine what its overall programme outcomes will be, and to align these with the outcomes, activities and assessments of each individual course within it. Secondly, when a programme is struggling to attract student numbers, this invites us to revisit similar processes, asking what the programme is for, how well the different courses are currently achieving their intended outcomes, and what changes might help students see the value of this programme. Finally, when different stakeholders have conflicting views about what a programme is for, programme outcomes in particular help to frame the conversation. Bachelor of Arts (BA) programmes in Cook Islands Māori, Hindi Studies, and Linguistics, respectively, will be used to illustrate the types of questions that have been asked of the curriculum in each of these scenarios.

Throughout, I argue that asking these questions of a curriculum is vital, but that care must be taken to ensure that the process of 'mapping' does not take on a life of its own, leaving the curriculum in its wake. As soon as discussions become dominated by surface-level attention to the phrasing and formatting of templates, at best, the process simply becomes an administrative distraction from teaching and, more worryingly, can lead misunderstandings of curriculum alignment to be recirculated and reinforced at increasing levels of authority.

## Introduction

Curriculum mapping<sup>2</sup> is not new. It emerged from the work of English (1980, 1983), who developed the approach in order to collect data on the amount of time spent on each content component of a school curriculum. He viewed the phenomenon as a "descriptive rather than prescriptive ... reconstruction of the real curriculum teachers have taught", in opposition to attempts more typically made in schools to tighten up documentation of what *should* be taught (English, 1980, p. 558). The intentions behind this early approach remain perfectly compatible with typical university curriculum discussions today, however informally the knowledge may be being shared and acted upon, since academics should expect to have some idea of what is covered by colleagues at different levels of their same programme, so that they know what knowledge, skills and behaviours they are responsible for in their own courses. Implicitly or explicitly, most academics hopefully also subscribe to the general principles of ensuring constructive alignment between what is taught and what is assessed (Biggs, 1996; Gibbs, 1999; Light, Cox, & Calkins, 2009). The process of mapping out a curriculum can simply be thought of as a way of ensuring that these discussions about what is taught and assessed - discussions that are often already happening around the photocopier, or as asides during departmental meetings - are made explicit, particularly to our students.

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is based on experiences from 2015 to 2016 in which USP's curriculum development activities were focused particularly on 'curriculum mapping' to the exclusion of many other aspects of the process. It is not intended as a critique of the latest phase of curriculum development that FALE is undergoing, but as a broader commentary on the institutional context in which it is being carried out.

However, within the global shift towards outcomes-based education, generally in response to a preoccupation with accountability and accreditation (Malan, 2000; Spady, 1994), institutions also now feel pressured to demonstrate to external stakeholders that they are producing graduates who can do particular things (Lam & Tsui, 2016). This has led to the defining of institution-wide graduate outcomes, which are then used as a top down barometer for what is being taught at the level of individual programmes and courses. In this way, curriculum mapping can be thought of as a combination of top-down mapping (e.g. to ensure that a course achieves outcomes that have been prescribed by an institution) and bottom-up mapping (e.g. to ensure that a course develops the discipline-specific skills, competencies and content knowledge required by that discipline). As Arafer (2016, p. 586) notes, in a statement that seems rather self-evident, “outcomes mapping [is] necessary, but not sufficient, to fully assess the appropriateness and alignment of a programme or course”, requiring, in addition, “a focus on mapping and assessing the *content* scope, sequence and intensity of coverage”.

In this paper, I will outline the processes through which the Linguistics and Languages discipline has developed or redeveloped the curriculum of three of its programmes: Cook Islands Māori, Hindi Studies, and Linguistics. Throughout this work, we have been driven by a strong commitment to the provision of high-quality programmes that develop content knowledge, behaviours and skills that are relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Pacific; that are pitched at an appropriate level for students coming into the programme and enable a desired level of achievement by the time of graduation; and that provide fair and equal opportunities for all students to learn and demonstrate their learning, wherever and however they have chosen to study. In curriculum mapping parlance, we have concerned ourselves with ensuring achievement of graduate, programme and course learning outcomes, and alignment between learning activities and assessments. I argue that this type of reflection and redevelopment is invaluable, but suggest that care needs to be taken in the way that it is handled as an institutional exercise to ensure that the process of ‘mapping’ does not take on a life of its own, leaving the curriculum in its wake.

### Three examples of mapping a curriculum

The first instance in which a curriculum must obviously be mapped out is when planning to implement a new programme. A programme should only be introduced if there is an identified need for it, and individual courses should only be developed for that programme if they will collectively fulfil that need. When the School of Language, Arts and Media (SLAM) was approached by the Cook Islands campus to develop a new language and culture programme, our first planning workshop at the campus therefore began with big questions such as: Why have we been asked for this programme? What do we hope to achieve by the end of it? The conversation was quickly dominated with broad concerns about raising the status of Cook Islands Māori and ensuring the survival and maintenance of this language, which we recognised as key objectives that had led to the proposal in the first place. However, we knew that the status and vitality of the language were not things that we could assess in any way during our programme. We needed specific tangible outcomes that we wanted our students to be able to demonstrate in the immediate term, rather than broad societal outcomes that we obviously hoped would be realised by the existence of the programme a decade or so down the line. We used our ideas about status and maintenance to think of specific skills and knowledge we could teach, and realised that these could be grouped into four key areas: students’ own competence in the language, their ability to analyse the way the language is used, their ability to tackle real-world problems relating to the use of the language, and the creation of new resources in the language. These four elements became the anchor for the whole programme, and could therefore be expressed as four programme outcomes - the tangible things we would expect all graduates to be able to do by the end of the programme.

We then moved to the level of individual courses, brainstorming on a classroom whiteboard to work out how many courses we would need, what each would need to contain, and what type of assessments would be included, in order to meet the programme outcomes. This stage took three full days. Three core team members were present throughout, and we were joined in several sessions by other members from the original committee who had requested the programme, collaboratively adding, erasing and rearranging until we were confident that we all had the same coherent picture. The fourth day was spent transforming our notes into official planning documents - new programme and course proposal forms - ensuring that we could articulate our outcomes and assessments in ways that were both transparent to non-specialists and consistent with institutional requirements. On the final day, the team presented the full proposal to stakeholders from the Ministry of Education, Public Service Commission, and the Cook Islands Māori Language and Culture committee. Feedback from this session then fed back into the documents, and a further month of work on the paperwork continued by email before being submitted to the School Board of Studies, Faculty Academic Standards and Quality Committee, University Academic Programmes Committee, Senate and then Council. Curriculum mapping, in this instance, was the initial mapping out of the process through which we could transform a request for a new programme from a member country into a coherent proposal that would ultimately be accepted by the institutional bodies, and thence into a successful programme that would deliver what it promised.

The second instance in which curriculum mapping is invaluable is when a programme is struggling to attract students. In 2015, it was announced that USP's Hindi Studies programme would be phased out unless external sponsorship could be found, since it did not have sufficient enrolments to meet the institution's threshold for financial viability. While feeling somewhat frustrated by the imposition of this viability discourse, especially for programmes that can only be taken by fluent speakers of one particular language, SLAM did recognise that the Hindi programme had been struggling for a number of years to attract school leavers and in-service teachers to take a degree in this discipline. The initial instinct was to increase our marketing efforts, but as the coordinator with overall oversight of the programme, I personally remained unsure about what the Hindi Studies programme was actually all about. Was it comparable to our other Pacific Vernacular programmes in the sense that it contextualised Hindi language, cultural and literary studies to the specific realities of Fiji, or was it comparable to a Hindi Studies programme that might be taught in India? Was it about enhancing proficiency in Hindi and, if so, was the target Shuddh Hindi or the variety spoken in Fiji? Was it intended to produce teachers of Hindi, or to train analysts of the language and its associated literature and culture? These were questions to which I wanted to know the answer before I felt we could have productive conversations about course development, staffing or marketing.

As a result, we have brought together a group of Hindi speakers from our school, some from the Linguistics programme and some from the Literature programme, and asked them to go through each course with the Hindi Studies coordinator, mapping out exactly what is taught. The first step (mapping), is simply to enable us to understand the contents of the programme as it stands at the moment, by articulating what students learn to do within each of the courses, and therefore what they will be able to do on completion of the whole programme. Once we have this shared understanding, the second step will be to consider whether any changes are needed. This will entail asking questions about the extent to which the programme appears relevant to the needs of the region, the extent to which it prepares students effectively for further academic and professional pursuits, and the extent to which it is accessible and attractive to school leavers in Fiji as well as potentially to Hindi-speaking students from other countries. It may be that the programme already ticks all three boxes, and we simply need to work on marketing it well, but we are open to the idea of redeveloping and refreshing some of the content. Now that we have so many new Pacific Vernacular programmes in different languages of the region, it is an appropriate time to rethink what it means to be a speaker of Hindi, or indeed to be of Indian descent, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Fiji, and model our Hindi

Studies programme accordingly. Curriculum mapping, in this instance, is the process through which we take stock of what we are doing and work out what we need to do to make a programme more attractive to students.

The third instance in which curriculum mapping is essential is when different stakeholders seem to have completely different ideas about what a programme is for. Indeed, when I was asked to coordinate the Linguistics discipline in 2015, I was also quite confused. Having originally come to USP as a Linguistics student, studying by distance from Vanuatu between 2005 and 2007, I had assumed that I would now be teaching similar courses that focused on describing and analysing the languages of this region, and applying this knowledge to practical matters such as translation, language maintenance, and vernacular education. However, I soon realised that most of what I had studied had been deleted, leaving a strange collection of courses, the majority of which had 'English' in the title, but which still seemed to focus on languages other than English in practice. I gradually discovered that a drastic restructure at around the time I had been a student had led to an attempt to amalgamate two very different programmes: one intended to train linguists (BA Linguistics) and the other intended to train in-service and pre-service secondary school teachers of English (the Literature/Language component of the Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts/Graduate Certificate in Education), in addition to a BA Literature and Language, which appeared to target those who weren't yet sure what to specialise in. Given that the goals of Linguistics and language teaching are completely different, it is impossible to meet the needs of both groups of students with a single set of courses. Sitting down to map out exactly what each course covered made it very clear that a graduate in Linguistics was not gaining enough knowledge or skills either to tackle real life issues affecting Pacific languages or to undertake postgraduate studies with any success, while a graduate teacher was not gaining enough knowledge or skills to teach English effectively. In this situation, we were recruiting high numbers of students but not meeting anybody's needs.

A long process therefore began, initially among the Linguistics team and then with the programme advisory committee, in which we attempted to undo some of the damage that had been done a decade earlier. We added a second course at each of 100-level and 200-level (the earlier restructure had left only one course at each level, thereby flouting institutional requirements for a major), and then worked out a programme structure that would require non-teaching linguists and trainee English teachers to take slightly different sets of courses in pursuit of different programme outcomes. Non-teaching linguists on a BA in Literature and Language now take three courses that are focused solely on Pacific languages and issues of this region, in addition to one course on the structure of English, and they have an option to take a further elective that teaches primary research skills and practical documentation techniques. English teachers, meanwhile, now take one course on the structure of Pacific languages, and then three courses that cover principles of language acquisition and use, the structure of English, and the use and teaching of English in the Pacific. Those on a BA Linguistics take all seven courses. In the final phase of the process, we are now working to map out exactly what we mean by 'learning' within each of these courses, articulating separate learning outcomes for each of content, linguistic skills and effective communication.

The result is still not satisfactory, since English teachers continue to take a programme that separates the pedagogy and curriculum (taught by the School of Education) from the principles of language (taught by us), rather than a programme in the teaching of English as a Second Language that integrates these components. Indeed, while the process of mapping out our curriculum has enabled us to initiate change and do a much better job of meeting the varying needs of two groups of students, it has also exposed some serious weaknesses that remain in the way that the region's pre-service and in-service English teachers are being trained. At the postgraduate level, it has been possible to address this gap by offering a new postgraduate diploma in Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching, but this is too late for the majority.

## Mapping the curriculum or doing curriculum mapping?

Having argued that the process of getting together with colleagues and mapping out what is happening in a curriculum is inherently useful, I now turn to some of the issues that arise when the process of curriculum mapping happens without adequate buy-in from those who care most about the programmes. I use examples from my own experience during 2015 and 2016 to illustrate each of these issues, as a way of demonstrating how fruitful discussions about curriculum can very quickly be undermined.

### When mapping is superficial

The first issue is when the process of mapping is seen as a superficial paperwork exercise. This was evident when FALE began to talk again about a whole-faculty initiative, and a number of staff members could be heard to say, “we have to do those maps again” or “it’s okay, we’ve already done our mapping”. This type of response stems from the way the process was handled in the past in many schools. My own experience of curriculum mapping in 2015 and 2016 was of sitting in lengthy meetings focusing on the formatting of tables, arguing about whether we were allowed more than three learning outcomes per course, and responding to new decisions from above such as that we would replace ‘A’ for ‘Advanced’ with ‘C’ for ‘Capstone’ and that we would no longer write ‘E’ for ‘Exposed’ in the table if we were exposing our students to skills such as teamwork but not assessing these explicitly. At no point did anyone discuss the curriculum that was supposedly represented by these tables of outcomes and abbreviations, but we dutifully redrafted and reformatted until the person to whom they were emailed stopped sending them back to us. This was, of course, not what was intended by whoever had first introduced the notion of curriculum alignment to USP, but this was the experience that many of us had, and it’s not surprising that many staff members came away from this experience with the view that this fiddling around with tables is synonymous with ‘curriculum mapping’.

It is true that some academics may need to be pushed to rethink what they have been teaching for years, and that all teaching staff should be engaged in a process of ongoing reflection and improvement. But asking reluctant staff to fill in tables (or allowing more willing or diligent staff to do the paperwork on their behalf), at best, has no impact at all on what is taught, and at worst, may lead to negative impacts such as students seeing documents with ‘the mapped version’ of what the course is about while the lecturer is teaching something different. When the map comes apart from its curriculum, we are left with yet another empty framework that simply detracts from the time that could be spent actually rethinking our practice.

As the coordinator for Linguistics, I found there was a complete disconnect between the productive conversations we were having within our team to map and then redevelop our curriculum, discussed above, and the process of ‘curriculum mapping’ that we were doing in response to directives that had somehow been lost in translation on the way down to us. I was committed enough to reworking our programme that I persevered with both mapping our curriculum (i.e. showing how our revised programme would better meet the needs of our students) and doing curriculum mapping (i.e. complying with the tables and box ticking exercise). However, someone with less paperwork resilience might understandably have focused on the latter and abandoned the task of actually trying to improve their programme, and in fact I began to understand why the Linguistics programme had been left unrevised for so long.

## When the principles underlying the process are misunderstood

A second issue arises when a misunderstanding underlying the process gets reinforced and legitimised as it becomes transformed into policy at increasingly higher levels of the university (cf. Blackledge, 2005, on 'chains of discourse'), leading to institutional decisions that disrupt the space in which valuable curriculum development work is taking place. The clearest example of this is the way that the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) has been interpreted within our institution. Bloom et al.'s basic point was that knowledge can be conceptualised at different levels of thinking, with the ability to recall factual information from memory considered a low order skill on which the progressively higher order skills of understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating are based. Being able to evaluate an academic argument, for example, presupposes the ability to analyse it, which assumes that the argument has been understood in the first place, and so on. The misunderstanding that has occurred at the highest levels of the University of the South Pacific is the belief that these levels of thinking should be separated across different levels of a programme, as evidenced by the following excerpt of a policy approved by Senate in April 2017 regarding the moderation of exam papers:

The writing of learning outcomes in the courses were based on the verbs chosen from the BLOOMS taxonomy ... i.e., 100 level courses, the learning outcomes have most of the verbs from the Knowledge and Comprehension, 200 level courses had most of the verbs from the Application and Analysis and 300 level courses had most of the verbs from Synthesis and Evaluation. ... The exam questions can be written similarly to the course learning outcomes i.e. by using the BLOOM'S verbs respective to the level of the course (Policy 1.6.2.46).

Even ignoring for the moment that the taxonomy has been misunderstood, there are so many flaws in logic if we attempt to put this into practice: firstly, what does this suggest that schoolchildren are doing, or indeed our own preliminary and foundation students, if we treat each level of thinking as belonging to one particular level of education? Kindergarten teachers routinely plan their lessons around all six levels of the taxonomy (e.g. Noble, 2004; Stobaugh, 2013; Strasser & Bresson, 2015), so why would we suddenly start again at the bottom at university? Secondly, what are postgraduate students supposed to do once we have run out of levels in the taxonomy? Thirdly, which verbs are we supposed to use in the programme outcomes that are intended to be achieved incrementally across the three levels of a degree, if each verb is supposed to fit into one level only? Fourthly, which level of thinking is envisaged by the graduate outcome of 'critical thinking and quantitative reasoning' that should be embedded at all levels of a programme, and how do we deal with the graduate outcome of 'creativity' if this is considered to be restricted to 300-level students? Finally, how does this understanding of Bloom's taxonomy fit with our attempt to apply Willison and O'Regan's (2013) Research Skill Development framework across the institution, given that the latter makes explicit reference to the development of facets such as analysis and synthesis at all levels?

As a concrete example of how this plays out in practice, a learning outcome that targeted synthesis of information about the region's myriad languages in a new 100-level Linguistics course was rejected at an Academic Standards and Quality Committee meeting in 2015 on the grounds that synthesis was too high-level for first years. When I asked if I could replace 'synthesise' with 'summarise', I was told I could (since this came from the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy), and yet there was no request to change my course content or assessment to ensure that no synthesis would actually go on in practice. With this sort of understanding of curriculum underpinning the decision making of a committee established to deal with 'standards and quality', the work being done on the ground to map and align our courses and programmes is rather undermined. Once again, I am aware that this misunderstanding is not shared by the majority of people involved in curriculum work at the institution, but once a policy becomes endorsed by Senate, it gains a legitimacy that renders any

attempt to reason with it futile, and marks us out as troublemakers who refuse to comply with regulations.

### When the process of mapping actually obstructs curriculum development

The third issue that may arise is when the reporting and approvals process associated with any changes to the curriculum is so off-putting that staff prefer not to make such changes. For example, if a staff member decides to build a more consistent focus on the development of research skills into the learning activities of a course, or decides to replace a written essay with a more creative assignment, this requires the completion of a course proposal form. This form runs to around twelve pages once filled out, and it requires the signatures of the University Librarian, the Director of IT Services and the Director of the Centre for Flexible Learning, in addition to the Associate Dean Planning and Quality, before being submitted to the School Board of Studies, the Faculty Academic Standards and Quality Committee and the Academic Programmes Committee. Giving so many different people the opportunity to discuss twelve pages of information about a course invariably leads to a range of feedback that is nothing to do with the change being requested. Spending time on this kind of paperwork means reducing the time spent giving useful formative feedback to students, or reading the latest research on the topics we're teaching, or investigating a new online tool that might be used in our practice. Sadly, this means that it is often prudent to continue with a course that is not as good as it could be and use the paperwork time for something else.

To illustrate the issue, we were told in 2015 that new courses should meet all institutional graduate outcomes (GOs), so I designed a Linguistics course called *Language use in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Pacific*, which was to be assessed via two major projects. During the first half of the course, the students would work in groups (GO: Teamwork) to collect digital photos or screenshots of the way languages are used around them (GO: Pacific consciousness) either in the physical landscape or on social media, and then present their analysis (GO: Critical thinking) in a written report (GO: Communication). We explicitly covered the ethical issues of collecting and presenting data in these two domains (GO: Ethics) as well as the importance of completing tasks according to their timeline and with due care (GO: Professionalism). In the second half of the course, the students would work individually to create a multilingual resource such as a video clip, webpage or online comic strip (GO: Creativity) to communicate a message of contemporary societal importance (GO: Communication, Pacific consciousness), accompanied by a commentary to explain the communicative choices made. I thought this was exactly the type of course that USP ought to be delivering, especially given its additional focus on the use of new technologies, but the initial proposal was rejected since the latest revision to the policy was that no single course could meet all graduate outcomes at once. I couldn't very well ask students to be less ethical or professional, or remove the Pacific focus, so I ended up changing the group research project to an individual one, so that I could remove teamwork from the outcomes. I always regretted this, but have never found the stamina to revisit the course design to put the group work back in.

New staff face a similar dilemma. We ask them in the interview to tell us about their teaching practice, and we often ask specifically about their experience of course development, the integration of new technologies in their pedagogy, and their willingness to engage in flexible learning design. However, once they are in post, it is much harder to harness those competencies that might have convinced us to hire them, since they would need to fill in all that paperwork before changing anything. Of course, a balance is needed, and the advantage of having the course, programme and institutional graduate outcomes clearly mapped out is that a new colleague can see at a glance how their courses fit into the bigger picture and can see which core outcomes are essential. But if all substitutions to reading materials, course content and assessment tasks must be run through the committee gauntlet first, we essentially undermine all the expertise and individuality that a new

staff member brings with them, and play into the hands of those who believe that academics can be replaced altogether by automated online courses.

The process of curriculum alignment is a continuous process, as we reflect on our practice, respond to student feedback, integrate new research findings, learn new ideas from our colleagues and other professional development opportunities, and respond to the changing needs of the region. The process of mapping and redeveloping the curriculum must therefore remain flexible enough that minor changes and innovations can be implemented with the minimum administrative fuss. While I applaud FALE's commitment to ensuring that all its courses and programmes are well aligned, the final step of seeking approval for any changes is so cumbersome that trying to tackle so much at one time may put people off ever making changes again, or indeed leave them feeling unable to undo some of the changes that might not work when tried out in practice.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the process of curriculum mapping and redevelopment is not simply an administrative exercise. It is about reflecting on the extent to which we are guiding students' development from novice to expert within the disciplines they have chosen to pursue, whether our courses are helping them to emerge as the type of graduates that USP envisages, and how far we are supporting them to complete the assignments that we use to validate their progress along this journey. It is about clarifying to ourselves what we are doing and why, and about finding a transparent and meaningful way to communicate the same to others.

There are obviously certain administrative elements of the process (which may include consistent formatting of tables!), but the two-dimensional map is simply a visual representation of something far more complex. It is a way of explaining what we are doing to others in shorthand, and it must not be seen to constitute the activity of redevelopment itself. The key to success is ensuring that these administrative or reporting elements do not undermine, distract from, or become completely separated from the discussions of curriculum, but that they are used to frame a collaborative space within which we can create what Bath, Smith, Stein, & Swann (2004, p. 313) refer to as a "valid and living curriculum" that embeds the outcomes that have been mapped out.

I argue that we need to move our institutional mindset from 'doing curriculum mapping' to 'mapping the curriculum', in order to see beneath the administrative and recognise a truly valuable and ongoing exercise. However, staff need to be able to engage with this process on their own terms, so that they don't feel they are being asked to do something simply because it's in a plan or a policy that has already been approved. We need to be trusted a little more, not because we are 'experts' with a PhD or a teaching award or a qualification in academic practice, but because the vast majority of us are in this job because we care about the learning experience of our students and we are already doing everything we can to support this. When staff see we are valued for the work we are doing on the frontline, and when those in positions of power take the time to notice that we may already be doing some of the things that are now being mandated, we buy in to institutional efforts that are being made to support this work.

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# Reflecting on the Alignment of Curriculum and Pedagogy in Education

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## Abstract

The focus of this paper is a curriculum alignment exercise undertaken by the School of Education at the University of the South Pacific. The aim of that exercise was to enhance the curriculum by methodically aligning the University's graduate outcomes with the teacher education programme outcomes, through to course learning outcomes and associated assessments. As educators, we speak to students through the curriculum (the heart) and pedagogy (the soul) of education. If there is misalignment, the heart and soul do not connect in the manner that they should. Through the work on alignment and the associated process of inquiry into our teaching, we sought to engage with our colleagues in the School and work through the issues that we experience on a daily basis. It was a deeply reflective time and using vignettes from our experiences intertwined with documentary analysis, we capture the process of re-engagement and the establishment of connective links. As educators in the Pacific, we trace this journey as leaders and implementers of the curriculum and identify the insights that we learnt along the way so that they may add to the understanding of others who may be on a similar journey.

## Introduction

This paper highlights the journey of female academics who participated in curriculum alignment exercises within the School of Education at The University of the South Pacific. While mapping was an important aspect of the process, the alignment exercise went far beyond that and was more broadly understood as curriculum development. This deeply reflective exercise is presented via mini vignettes that tell the story of the process as those academics experienced it. Even though it was a collective journey for the School, it was also a personal journey for each participant and these 'intimate' reflections are interwoven into this piece. The paper is compiled as a series of narratives with discursive elements of critical reflection that will be used as learning points for further exploration in the curriculum development process.

Institutional work on the curriculum began at The University of the South Pacific (USP) in 2011 with a systematic curriculum review known as STAR (Strategic Total Academic Review) which facilitated the development of the USP Graduate Outcomes (GOs) and provided professional learning support for 'trainers' within all disciplines and schools. In June 2015, the University submitted an Eligibility Application to the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) and by January 2018, the University prepared a report which outlined the journey towards seeking WSCUC accreditation. The curriculum development process began independently of WSCUC but eventually contributed to the WSCUC preparation and report. Engagement with WSCUC also helped the office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor Learning & Teaching to refine their curriculum development plan and processes. The aim of this initiative was to support the University in enhancing "its contribution to the public good and the provision of sustainable quality higher education in the Pacific region and internationally" (WSCUC Accreditation Report, 2018). As part of the preparation for that accreditation, the University engaged

in a curriculum alignment process across all schools. The USP Graduate Outcomes had been revised and the School of Education, along with other academic units of the University, embarked on a process of systematic, continuous, improvement. One of the aspirations of the curriculum alignment exercise was to develop communities of learning (Du Four, 2004) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) across the University. The scholarship on these communities, together with constructive curriculum alignment provided the theoretical underpinning for our reflections on our experiences.

## Literature Review

Central to the development of a Community of Practice (COP) is social participation and learning. There are three essential elements that are required for the establishment of a community of practice: domain, community and practice (Wenger, 1998, 2002). It is not to be confused with a club or a group of people who share the same interest. As the nomenclature suggests, the community is comprised of practitioners who collaborate over an extended period of time to improve their practice. To achieve this, practitioners share their stories, their concerns as well as their solutions, ideas, strategies and assets. Sometimes communities of practice evolve into communities of learning where the practice of sharing is transformed into a process of collective learning and participants make concerted efforts to sustain their learning over time.

In an exercise like curriculum alignment the community of practice explores “the degree to which expectations [i.e. standards] and assessments are in agreement and serve in conjunction with one another to guide the system toward students learning what they are expected to know and to do” Webb (1997, p. 4). When alignment exercises are conducted within an estranged community, then the flow of the alignment becomes difficult to achieve. The team becomes caught up with the process of ‘forming, storming and norming’ before they get to the stages of performing and adjourning. (Tuckman, 1965). During the process, there may be disagreements and personality clashes which would need to be resolved before the group is able to move forward. Sometimes the clashes and disagreements are so intense within the group that the members are not able to emerge from the ‘storming’ phase without the support and guidance of a mediator. When constructive alignment exercises are successful the curriculum (heart), pedagogy (soul) and assessment exercises are connected in flow so that learning becomes coherent and is able to provide objective evidence in a manner that provides opportunities for ongoing whole-school development.

Constructive alignment strongly connects the alignment of teaching with the constructions of learning. Biggs and Tang (2007), recognizing that connectedness and coherence in the process of quality of teaching at programme level, argued that constructive curriculum alignment of teaching, learning, and assessment, is absolutely crucial. Biggs (n.d.) explains that:

Constructive alignment is more than criterion-reference assessment, which aligns assessment to the objectives. CA [Curriculum Alignment] includes that, but it differs (a) in talking not so much about the assessment matching the objectives, but of first expressing the objectives in terms of intended learning outcomes (ILOs), which then in effect define the assessment task; and (b) in aligning the teaching methods, with the intended outcomes as well as aligning just the assessment tasks.

In order to optimize learning, students need to be able to identify the logical links between curriculum, the learning activities and the assessments. It is in that process that the learning objectives become actual learning outcomes, and the students’ learning is enhanced. By making the necessary connections and ensuring that every activity is relevant the achievement of the learning objectives becomes possible. This means that the curriculum and pedagogy must be intertwined to the point where the students understand them as the ‘heart’ and ‘soul’ of education respectively. Dynamic pedagogical approaches provide opportunities for the curriculum to take on a new life and have the

inherent potential to allow educators to transform learning. However, there are social processes involved in and underpinning these instructions that also need to be understood and unpacked.

Habermas (1972) argued that all human knowledge is a social construction that is corrupted by the various ideologies which serve different interest groups and individuals. Engaging in critical thinking about those ideologies and interests, and therefore being able to discern the limitations and potentials of the various kinds of knowledge, is desirable and could lead to empowerment and creation of new knowledge. Thus, the strength of critical pedagogy is the application of critical social science to education. It was in this spirit of engagement that the School of Education engaged in the collective responsibility of curriculum alignment.

During the initial stages, the various groups within the School of Education reflected on and reviewed all documents and learning outcomes. This was an important aspect of the process as the collective enquiry that we undertook corresponds to Freire's conception of the process of knowledge creation. As Freire (1972, p. 46) argues, it is through the action and the reflection on that action that "...knowledge emerges [and it is] only through intervention and re-intervention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful enquiry" that we become truly human. Reflection within a Freirean context would begin with the recognition of educational dilemmas or emotional discomforts resulting in a cyclical process where information circulates, and is acted upon, analysed and revised until meaning is arrived at. Of course, this would need to be explored within a framework of respect and commitment. Freire suggested that the lecture format, where the teacher regurgitates knowledge and either pours that knowledge into the students' waiting heads or allows students to absorb the information, possibly through osmosis, should be replaced by the "culture circle" (Freire, 1972, 1973) where teachers and students are able to meet one another and discuss issues of concern or problems in their own lives, discuss their causes, and propose actions that could be taken to solve and or resolve them. Through his writings and his face-to-face interactions, Freire encouraged stakeholders in education to participate in dialogue as 'co-learners'. This is where people grapple with their 'culture' and through *conscientization* or critical thinking they are able to recognise that they make decisions which shape their lives and are able to participate in transforming their lives and the lives of others either individually or collectively. The idea of professional learning communities (PLCs) in schools resonates strongly with this Freirean thinking. This opportunity to align the curriculum at the School of Education allowed staff to work in professional learning communities or groups within a larger community of practice to:

... create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge. (Freire 1998, p. 49)

DuFour and Reeves (2015) adopted the idea of professional learning communities to provide school leaders and teachers with on-going opportunities to collaborate in order to have a positive impact on students and their learning. They emphasised that: "[a] professional learning community is not simply a meeting. It is an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recursive cycles of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve" (para 7 of online newsletter). Though this was a strategy for schools, the experience could easily be replicated within tertiary education. The group process as experienced in the School of Education at USP was intended to guide important conversations within the School about current strengths and challenges in pursuit of an aligned curriculum that would better support student learning, teaching and assessment. One perceived possible outcome of collaborations of this type over an extended period of time was enhanced professional learning and development.

## Methodology

This paper employs an auto-ethnographical approach in which the authors of the paper interviewed each other, reflected on our experiences, and jointly wrote about these experiences. This reflective study has provided spaces for different voices to be heard. It has also provided a pathway through which we, as researchers, have been able to re-interpret curricula and pedagogies while re-searching or looking again at the world to create 'new knowledge'. Rather than being a dialectic engagement with theory and practice, the reflection became a multi-lectic experience containing several spaces for reflection and engagement at varying levels. One of the interesting things about conducting this type of research in a single School of the University is that everyone knows everyone else so there is a strong inter-connectedness. As Louisy (1997, p. 202) explains:

... small societies grow up within interdependent networks where the same individuals figure many times. Social relationships are therefore multicomplex: there is a coincidence of overlapping of roles, in which individuals are tied to each other in many ways.

An important part of the inquiry process was drawing on the researchers' reflections and recollections which inevitably depend on memory as a source of data. Sometimes these are dismissed by traditional western historians as not being authentic. Memory, explains Chamberlain, (1995, p. 94) "...is malleable, is susceptible to confusion and conflation, to lapses and lying, to suggestion and sensation, and always to the role of the imagination". In spite of this argument, memory of circumstances and events may be all that is left to record the 'stories' of social groups who went through similar experiences. These groups may be tied together because of commonalities such as gender, race, class, and culture. Memory is a human capacity and as such offers particular insights to an event or series of events in time and place. Its validity lies in the notion that it may present a different level of credibility to events because of its autobiographical nature. Chamberlain (1995, pp. 108-9) argues that:

Memories are imaginative recountings, representative of a set of meanings, by which and through which lives are interpreted and transmitted, constructed and changed. Rather than relegate gender and memory to the edges of history, they should be foregrounded as one of a set of central, interpretative tools for understanding the nature and process of historical change.

The participants (the authors of this article) are female course coordinators for their respective disciplines with a sound working knowledge of the School to which they belong.

We were interested in exploring the extent to which the curriculum alignment exercise made a difference to our daily academic practice, identifying the challenges we experienced along the way and possibilities that could occur as a result of the exercise. As educators, we reflected on several aspects of the curriculum alignment exercise providing initial thoughts about the exercise, our understanding of the term curriculum alignment, our levels of interaction and frustration, the extent to which facilitation was supported, the challenges experienced, the take-away learning from our experiences, and the impact of these experiences on the quality of our work.

## Discussion through Reflections

### Initial Thoughts about Curriculum Alignment

When Ledua spoke about her initial thoughts about curriculum alignment, she explained that when she heard the expression the first thing that came to mind was:

*the alignment of the national curriculum, that is, the relationships between what is taught, assessed, what one hopes to achieve at the end of the courses and what the students hope to achieve at the end of the courses.*

She went on to explain that at the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Fiji, alignment meant that:

*the curriculum must be aligned to all the activities, the content, including the assessments. The vision that I have of alignment at the School of Education has been there for a while.*

When she began working at USP in 2012, she lost her appreciation of alignment because there was no induction programme :

*you either swam or sank because nobody told me what to do. I was given a set of books with the programmes, the schedule to be covered during the semester and the assessments that were expected of the students. I discovered as we went along that everybody did their own thing. The only person I remember who talked about alignment so much and who actually showed me how she aligned her work, her learning outcomes to the content and the assessment was Prof. Konai.*

In more recent times:

*the alignment that we started with the Consultant facilitator was again an eye-opener for me because we did in-depth work on alignment and that was when I deeply started to understand what alignment was all about. I am thankful that I went through the process with her. It was hectic. It was a headache. Sometimes it seemed that we were changing everything everyday as we moved along but at the end ... we realized that it's worth it.*

Vulori explained that she was excited when she heard about the curriculum alignment exercise and: *"thought it was about time we did that as a school."*

She further explained that she was:

*introduced to curriculum alignment by the former Head of School, who was leading in 2010, and used the expression very often in our Board of Studies discussions. From that time, I use to take the initiative myself to find out more about the process of curriculum alignment and I was doing that to make sure my courses had some elements of coherence and alignment. When the opportunity was presented for the School to participate in the curriculum alignment process, I enjoyed it, and looked forward to the sessions, because I felt that I had some understanding of the processes.*

For Vulori, who was teaching Curriculum Studies 1 and Curriculum Studies 2 at the time:

*the term was very much used in our methods of how teachers needed to make sure that whatever teachers planned in their lesson was aligned, in terms of their learning outcomes, the activities they were going to use, the activities that were going to happen within the lesson for the particular period of the class (usually 30 – 45 minutes) and in the ten or twenty minutes they were assigned during micro teaching lessons.*

Ann Cheryl in sharing her memories about alignment at the University explained that:

*I had developed courses at other universities and understood the importance and process of alignment. Curricula are designed to cater to the needs of the students. It stands to reason that the curricula should be informed by the objectives set by the institution and School and driven by the changing learning needs of the students. The basic tenet of testing only what you teach was central to the understanding of assessment and it was important to understand the degree to which learners could transfer the learning from the classroom to an applied situation, for example through a problem based assignment or case study via the assessment.*

*My pet grumble, however was the ever-changing versions of course proposals forms that needed to be completed which all seemed highly repetitive and illogical (to me at least). As an educator, I take pride in establishing flow and linkages and had established a collegial relationship with the consultant-facilitator in the early stages of her being here because I was developing new courses and needed a critical friend with whom to interact and discuss issues related to course development. I was very pleased to find that the consultant was open for discussion, was encouraging and even shared creative ideas about the courses that I was developing.*

When asked about how she felt when the process first started, Ledua explained:

*At the first meeting, I was confused because I wasn't thinking about curriculum alignment as a whole. I was looking at it as related to bits and pieces. I had to spend some time reflecting for a couple of days after we had our first meeting to try and really understand what we did in the first meeting. But you know I guess because of my age too, it took a little bit slower to sink in and a little bit slower to understand but by the fourth meeting I think I had grasped a lot of what was going to happen in the process.*

*But I think for me it was like learning a new thing and like focusing on much more important things than what I used to do before because now we looked at things step by step. First thing we had to do was look at the learning outcomes and relate it to the graduate outcomes and teacher attributes but even when we started changing the teacher attributes, that too was a major thing because when I came into this University, nobody told me or talked to me about it. They would say, "it's there on the chart, it's there on the page". No one had actually gone through each of those with me or with any of the staff members.*

*For me that was a learning process and I was glad because, what was happening in 2017 was what should have been what happened in 2012 when I first joined Laucala Campus. It has taken five years for somebody to come up with something new so for me that was a learning experience, a big learning experience. It was tough at the beginning of the workshops.*

When Vulori was asked about how she felt when the process first started, she explained that she thought it was 'cumbersome':

*... because we were not all on the same page. Some saw it as a waste of time, some saw it as irrelevant, and some saw it as something to fill up our time. Very little did they know, that is what makes a lesson when they are aligned properly from the learning outcome, to the activities, to the assessment task. When that is done properly and correctly, and in this case, the whole school, it was to do with the individual courses aligned to the overall programme for that particular programme and then to the school and then to the University, that needed to be done. But when we did it together, when we were asked to do it as a school together in specific programmes and sections, I thought I saw a lot of that negativity*

### Frustrations

When Ledua was asked about how the team interacted, she explained that there was an original team which comprised a smaller group which "... worked really well with one another because I think there was only three of us involved, apart from the two that guided us through the exercise."

She continued by explaining that when the smaller groups merged into larger groups:

*the larger groups caused a lot of confusion because they came with their different ideas and different ways of looking at alignment. Some people were very violent, because they didn't like this alignment exercise.*

*I interpreted this as some members of the School not liking the fact that other people were telling us to do this exercise because you know from a Pacific island perspective, there are those of us who don't take too kindly for those from outside telling us what to do. I think that was the frustration for me.*

*We kept see-sawing from left to right to center. We did one thing in one moment with the consultant and her assistant and in our next meeting, because they wouldn't be available, only those who were available came. When those two were out of the picture, havoc happened.*

*After those sessions, everyone jumped in with their own version of alignment and said all kinds of thing that they wouldn't say when the consultant was there. So when the consultant was away, members of the larger group would spill out everything they didn't like. The confusion came about because too many cooks spoil the soup. The confusion occurred when we joined with the bigger groups - the smaller the group, the easier it was and the more focused that group was as well. In the bigger group, there were several differences of opinion and that inhibited the work we were doing. We were trying to align things and sometimes the suggestions that people made, were completely the opposite of what we had already decided when we began working with the consultant. That caused a lot of chaos.*

*I became very frustrated and got to point where I said, no I am not going to be involved in alignment, not with anyone but the two whom I began working with in the small group because I have to get myself straight with the way I teach, the way I do courses, the way I develop and write down the learning outcomes, and the way I develop and write down my assessment.*

Fulori experienced frustration when the meetings 'dragged'. She continued by saying that:

*... a lot of times, we could have done a lot in a short period of time but we individually, as academic staff, took it upon ourselves to do it outside the meeting time so when we came in we were ready to move on and just tweak little bits like this one does not align with this one and things like that, but unfortunately, it took more time than what we required initially.*

Ann Cheryl's frustrations emerged because of her workload:

*I felt that I had so many responsibilities that I found myself missing meetings or arriving late to meetings. If there were arguments about process when I was present at meetings, I felt irritation because I felt that I was wasting my time and could get on with some of my other duties. This was a test in patience.*

## Facilitation

Ledua was asked to what extent the facilitators were supportive of the alignment exercise. She responded by saying that:

*Oh I think to a great extent, they were very supportive of the exercise. They were very helpful. Not only them, I think, I cannot just say them, there are members in the School who have been really helpful, apart from the facilitators.*

Ledua identified two of her colleagues who had a particularly positive influence on her.

*I have gained a lot from what they have produced and said as well as the things we did together. I find that I understand better when we discussed ideas as a team. I feel that I'm a better teacher, an honest teacher and a person that the students will enjoy having in class. That's another important area. When you do your work well, which I believe this alignment process has helped me with, the students will like the way you teach, they will understand the*

*courses that you teach them and the activities that you give them. That for me was a positive end.*

Ann Cheryl acknowledged that she enjoyed working with the small team better than she enjoyed worked with the larger team:

*In the smaller team, I felt there were more opportunities to express ourselves, provide rationales for the decisions that we had taken and work towards solutions for the course for which we were responsible.*

Support provided

When asked to share her perception about the extent to which the facilitation was supported., Vulori said that in her: *"... personal opinion, their physical behaviour, suggested the facilitation was not supported very well"*.

*I was kind of reading this very early, and they were I think more frustrated, to say the least but I think the presence of the other colleagues who tried to pitch in and make sure that they would come back in the next rounds, probably balanced that off.*

*In the later stages, I think because now the staff members found their footing and the understanding of the whole alignment process, it made the whole exercise much easier.*

*If I may use the example of the Grand Pacific Hotel late last year, this was a good example because we actually had to sit in different tables and had to tease out just one and in that one it made those who were skeptical about the whole process come out and actually look at it as a more constructive exercise rather than something that they were obliged to do.*

She continued by clarifying that her areas of expertise lay in a very distinctive area of the School. Vulori explained the process through which she was able to engage with the alignment of her courses. As with Ledua, her approach was very proactive and this stood her in good stead:

*TVET had an independent session, as those courses were not covered within the Education courses. I actually did the alignment for the TVET courses first before I met with the Consultant. I tried to map it all out so that when we did the discussions, it would be very easy for them. During the exercise, they just asked me to explain my attempt at alignment to the wider programme outcome and the University. I had to justify and rationalize the reasons behind the decisions I had taken and the suggestions I had put forward.*

*I knew the content of the courses and our discursive exchanges became a very interactive and cordial process. We completed the exercise for TVET in a few hours because I had previously mapped the seven courses for the TVET major programme. For that one, I had to make sure we were working on the original approved ASQC [Academic Standards & Quality Committee] of those years. Because now that a lot of those things are felt now, Industrial Arts is needing more attention, that had not been happening, it was my responsibility that I brought that one back, and to make sure that this year, in 2019, we are actually using the ASQC approved 2010 course outlines. And so in that process, because I had taken the lead, in the final alignment it took us only half an hour and the other one it just took us two hours for the whole because we did the 100 levels together, and I went back, and I realigned the 200 and the 300, and so when we met the second time, there was no need because it was just them asking me why this and why not that, why the repetition. In the skills it has to be repeated in 200 level and 300 level because of competency. So for that, for me, I saw that they were very accommodating regarding my comments and they were the bouncing boards for all the 'whys',*

*to refine the whole alignment for the courses themselves individually, to the programme outcomes and to the University wide.*

### Challenges Experienced

Ledua explained that for her, one of the many problems, was the leadership problem. Her argument was:

*... if you have a team like this for alignment and you have a leader who is rock solid in both decision making and the way s/he decides things, and the way s/he states things, things should have flowed freely.*

In reflecting on the challenges, Ledua argued that for her, the challenge with the alignment programme was really just the regular meetings. She elaborated further by explaining her point of view:

*Although I understood that it was essential, I just had too many things that had been put on my shoulder by the powers that be, that was draining all my energy and my time too.*

*We had the allocated times, it was fine but then, there were other things like if there would have been an ASQC meeting or an Advisory Meeting, and all of these things that keep coming in because these were poorly organized activities without structure. If we had a yearly plan from the Head of School, alignment meetings could have been inserted into the plan for the year. We would have been able to better organize the process throughout the semester or the whole year. I probably wouldn't have felt so stressed. As it played out, we received late messages about other school meetings which required my presence the next day. We would receive the email request at mid night for action the following morning. Sometimes when we trying to work on our courses, trying to do what we have learnt from the alignment team, and work on our papers and courses, we are suddenly upon to attend other meetings and activities.*

*I think that for me was the biggest challenge for me, in the school was the leadership in the school. There was no proper leadership pattern where you have organized activities, at least a plan, we had work plans but it has never been achieved most of it though. The only work plan that is achieved, is the work plan that I do in terms of teaching the courses, but otherwise I cannot do research. I cannot do anything because there are so many things requirements that you are expected to do in order to cover for others.*

*Sometimes you are not part of that committee, you're not part of that team, you get called to represent the Head or the Deputy to attend. These are the things that make you really angry because you know I am always angry when we go to the workshops, sometimes I am in a pretty bad mood when I go into the alignment workshop meetings but then after a while because the team is so good, I relax. The team gives that kind of flexibility, that relaxation, that relaxing mood that I need. I think that after the fourth or fifth meeting, I realized that it was better to go to the alignment meeting then all the other meetings that were sent to us at short notice, because I find that they were a better team. They gave me a lot more peace of mind than all the other meetings that I had to go to where I was expected to return to the School and prepare a report. I was also challenged by the fact that even though there were certain things in the school that were not my duty to do, I had to do those. I had to write many reports because somebody needs a report. When I write a report and my name is not acknowledged anyway. Those were the challenges, but for me that was the biggest challenge, unplanned organization of work.*

As with many group projects, all was not smooth sailing. There were several bumps along the way and some of these were gender related. Ledua explained that there were issues that she felt that the School needed to address. Towards the end of the interview, she exclaimed:

*I also have another challenge. I noticed when we were going through this alignment process, I realized there was gender bias. We had a gender group, for instance, it was always as if, the men, had an idea, and all backed up that idea, so it was more a male dominant team than an equal team. I mean, the women we would have our say, but how many of us are in the team. It always ends up with the men being in charge, and being in control. Even in our larger meetings, it was always the men that were in control and always the men that were always loudmouthed and it was always the men that always had their way and were always heard. It usually went in the men's favour rather than the women's favour. That was one of the things that I noticed with our alignment. I am just thankful that there were a few women, when I say few, I mean 1, 2 maybe 3 that were very vocal and often stated their case and after that the men would sit back and realize oh yeah, they got a point. So it was this men's club and these women, we did not have a women's club we always had this men's club that was always dominant in this alignment workshop. That was the other challenge that I felt.*

Lack of understanding of what was meant by curriculum alignment and what was involved in the process of curriculum alignment were cited as two areas of dissonance experienced. Ledua indicated that she “takes three to four weeks ensuring that students master that skill of aligning their learning outcomes in their lessons” and noted that not all lecturers in the School of Education taught on ED 250 (Curriculum Studies 1) and ED 350 (Curriculum Studies 2) and may not have sound understandings of Curriculum and Pedagogy.

Vulori argued that one of the challenges experienced were due to the paucity of internal preparation of the academic staff themselves. She felt that amongst the activities integral to the process was the need for everyone to be speaking the same language when it comes to constructive alignment. She confessed that several times she asked herself whether her work colleagues truly understood what constructive alignment meant, because not all of them developed the pedagogy or teaching methods for Curriculum Studies courses. She said that:

*for some of us, that is basically what and where we drill down day-in and day-out. That is, when the students are doing their lesson plans. It is important to get the alignment right. For me, I take three to four weeks making them master that skill of aligning their learning outcomes in their lessons. I think is a big problem because if you look at some of the course outlines, they hardly align, and I am not sure if that has been that way for a long time and it continues to be so. Because some of our colleagues continue to be rigid in their approach and not wanting to change, they allow the old incorrect processes to prevail and they revert to the old behaviours.*

Vulori felt that colleagues had differing understandings of the task at hand and several persons did not fully understand the concept of constructive alignment and so the scheduling of meetings became arduous and “was not seen as a priority”.

*I think that we as academic staff of the School of Education need to be initially talking from the same page. Do we all understand the process of constructive aligning? Of course, the negativity conveyed through the responses of the staff members when scheduling the meeting showed, it was obvious that they didn't see it as important or as a priority. Because we are teaching, we are training teachers I see it as a key area they must master as teacher trainers because that actually affects what goes on the classroom and if we've been receiving complaints from the public that our teachers are not performing, as they should be, maybe we need to be looking back at our delivery and our deliverables. Maybe we are not doing it right. Maybe our documentation is not correct. Maybe the way we are doing things is no longer student-centered as it should be but more or less for us to cover our work and to be done with things.*

*As an academic process, we need to be involving ourselves in this activity day-in and day-out. Unfortunately, some of us hold on to the old course outlines and all we do is tweak the year and details for the old course outline and use it the following year. We don't actually take time to review our previous methods and develop new ways of doing things so that we are evolving as well. I say this because sometimes we do not look at the Strategic Plan of the University, we do not read other documentations that the University expects us to read, we do not have access to the Faculty documentation so that every year we are supposed to be preparing new course outlines with new approaches and assignments included.*

*For example, this year I am trying to push for more enterprise in the courses I'm teaching because that is one area the University is moving into. It may not be the same aspects as what the University defines as enterprise but for us as a practical subject, that should basically be part and parcel of what we do. Therefore, the challenges of having to review, and reflect on past events and practices, thinking about the strategies that you could use to make the lesson interesting. The answers go back to those of us in the training section of the School of Education, understanding the roles and responsibilities that go with our career. We need to ask ourselves whether we are there just to earn a salary at the end of the month or are we really keen on teaching our students to be master teachers. We need to teach our students how to be independent thinkers, and how to prepare their lessons well and do right by whatever institution or whatever Ministry of Education or whatever schools they go into.*

## Discussion through reflection

This auto-ethnographical approach has been chosen because it capitalises on the researchers' understanding of curriculum and pedagogy. The attributes which have been important to this exercise are those of: environmental awareness and on-going sensitivity to events and situations; critical awareness of the dynamics of local and regional contexts; being in touch with the social and cultural changes of the people; perceptual objectivity in order to distinguish between one's own thinking and constructs as opposed to those of others; and, an ongoing reflection on oneself in relation the ever-emerging circumstances of the research.

We have discovered through our engagement with the issues that communication and interpretations were multi-layered which supports the view put forward by Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 739) that autoethnography "...displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural." Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 740) argue that in ethnography "authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions."

It is reflexive in nature as it provides an opportunity for the author-researchers to turn back on themselves as they make themselves part of their own enquiry. The authors have used this approach to delve deeply into themselves and unearth their motivations and concerns. The team decided to adopt a different approach to sharing information and they became what Freire would term 'a culture circle' except this culture circle was not based on actual country or regional culture but on gender. In order to achieve the goals of educational transformation, Freire argues that one needs to consider the use of dialogic culture circles as dialogue encourages collaborative learning by limiting 'teacher-talk' or in this case, 'manager - talk'.

This process allowed the participants as themselves, to name their experience and encouraged each to find their voice within the context. Interestingly, our differences emerged as a result of our previous experiences and the impact of our cultural traditions on our lives. One member of the team

came from a matriarchal society and is accustomed to expressing herself in professional contexts. The two other members were socialized in the iTaukei tradition, where in some communities, women are far less outspoken because the power of the voice, lies in patrilineage. This was a journey to give voice to the often unheard in higher education in the Pacific. The themes that emerged through this journey were their initial thoughts about curriculum alignment; their frustrations; the facilitation process; the support provided; challenges experienced. In the discussion that we shared, we understood that Pacific research methodologies are grounded in ideas of culture, practices, values and relationality (Fa'avae, 2018).

Members of the team, used this experience to connect to future aspirations and consider ways in which they could leave a continuing legacy and have an on-going positive impact in the Pacific spaces within which they interact. For example, moving forward, Ledua clarified that the:

*...the best thing about this alignment was that now you can teach your students, who are going to be teachers out there in the field. You're going to teach them how to align the curriculum that they are given by the government and the school, the contents of which they will create a device basing it on the relevancy and the needs within the classroom. They will also be graduating students who will live in the world, not only pass an exam but will actually live in the world and be successful people and these are our future leaders. They will be educating younger children, who will become our future leaders and for me, that is the impact that will happen.*

*So I will have an impact and I am hoping that the teachers I teach will have that impact as well, that will go right down to the next generation and the next generation and that it will build up a society that has values, that will live cordially amongst one another, that will be honest in the way they do things and become good citizens of the countries they serve whether it's for us here, it's the Pacific Region, that's the impact and that's the greatest thing about this.*

The data was based on the reflections of the academics who had been through the curriculum alignment exercise and notes derived from their diaries that explained the process of curriculum alignment. This auto-ethnographical approach was used as a response to hegemonic understandings of the world (Ellis & Bochner, 2008, pp. 128, 129) and offers a dialogue of hope, new understandings and expanding possibilities.

These stories, while they are accounts of the experiences of three women who at that time were Course Coordinators in the School of Education, they also speak to the issues of gender; power relations; leadership and the quality of commitment to education. In this paper, we set out to explore several themes: initial thoughts about curriculum alignment; the process of alignment; facilitation of the alignment process; and, support provided. While these were explored, the themes that emerged through reflection were frustration, resistance and the importance of leadership in the development of a professional learning community within the school. Upon reflection, it was only through respect for the various cultures involved and valuing the contributions of the others in spite of differences, that we were able to collaborate with other staff members in the alignment of the curriculum within the School of Education. Through dialogue and a critical engagement with educational issues we were addressing some of the longstanding issues of mis-alignment.

Based on the feedback from the course coordinators, it would seem that the quality of leadership is an important factor in realising success. One of the issues that emerged is that staff were called together to work on several issues as required 'when the needs arose'. However, it seems that it would be advantageous as a School to develop a professional learning community culture as a common practice. In this way, the School could develop a learning culture that could contribute to the

development of the education system not only at the university level but also in the education systems across the Pacific.

This strategy if developed to the point where it becomes the natural learning culture of the School and could be used as a successful case study of 'good practice' within the education system. An improvement in the School's learning culture would build teaching capacity and inevitably improve student achievement (Fullan, 2008, 2009, 2010). This practice would become continuous professional learning for regular staff as well as new members of staff which would be a counter-balance to isolationism and working in subject-related silos thus promoting inter-disciplinary and transdisciplinary thinking and experiences and perhaps growing toward a genuine, system-wide learning unit.

## Conclusion

So in conclusion, we continue with our reflective trend and explore what we have gained as a result of this curriculum alignment exercise. Ledua explained that she is a better teacher for having gone through the alignment exercise *and is now content with what she currently teaches compared with her previous practices*. She continued:

*in 2017 and during 2018, I realized that alignment helped me to enjoy teaching because I seem to know how I am teaching, what I am going to teach, what I am going to use to assess the students rather than just assess the students on a pass or failure mark. It wasn't only about passing all the students, it was about helping the student really understand the activities in which they are engaged, the content matter, the learning outcomes, and the assessment process. For me, that is what alignment is and it has been an enriching experience for me over the past two years. I have noticed the improved exam results of the students. I teach better because I know that I am aligning things properly whereas in the past it was just something that I went ahead with without really any plan at all, without looking at the end product. Now I am looking at the end product.*

*Practising alignment is an excellent way of learning and teaching whether it be at University, Secondary or Primary levels. I am now sharing that with the students at the B. Ed Primary course and those at Secondary Schools. I have learnt a lot from the experiences of other people based on work they had done at USP and at other Universities.*

Vulori felt that through the alignment exercise, she has now been empowered to:

*look at more and exciting ways of making sure that my students will enjoy my lessons. The last batch of students may not be the same as the incoming students so the activities I did with them may not be taken on board at the same as it was taught ... for me, it is a very very important process because are we going to align things vertically for our courses (online, blended or face-to-face). We must remember that we will also need to keep reminding ourselves that we will need to align ourselves horizontally to the Strategic Plan of the University, to the Faculty and then to the School. So my question is do we have a strategic plan for the School?*

For, Ann Cheryl the alignment exercise was very timely as she was developing new courses and that opportunity was a necessary endeavour to enable her to work with others who understand the University mechanisms better than she did:

*I used the alignment exercise as a sounding board to test my own thinking about the material and to stretch my imagination of what the course could be in a manner that could motivate*

*students to be active learners. I was relieved when the first phase was completed. Many times, I doubted that we would get there but the consultant was kind and good-natured which were qualities that kept the larger team buoyant even when some of the challenges seemed insurmountable.*

*This was also an opportunity to better understand the other courses offered by the School and to contribute to the discussions about curriculum and pedagogy in a manner that was constructive and hopefully forward thinking. I was able to share my experiences from places where I had previously worked and to engage in several occurrences of critical engagement with my colleagues, the consultant and her assistant.*

The use of auto-ethnography in this context helped us as authors to think deeply about our own experiences, not as self-indulgence but to share our insights about the process, culture and social experiences. We all learnt something new because this was a platform where, through reflection, we felt comfortable sharing insights about our journey through curriculum alignment. We all recognized that student success is central to the success of curriculum alignment. The focus should be clear and consistent on student learning. DuFour (2004, p. 6) insists that it "is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, has profound implications".

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# Curriculum alignment: A legal experience

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## Abstract

The School of Law at The University of the South Pacific embarked upon a curriculum review of its LLB programme in 2018. The review started with presentations on the significance of curriculum alignment, followed with a discussion on the linkage between course learning outcomes and programme graduate outcomes. This fed into the mapping of these outcomes across the degree programme; where appropriate the outcomes were rewritten. This article discusses the process of undertaking this curriculum alignment process; the authors will draw primarily on their experiences.

*Keywords: higher education, curriculum alignment, course learning outcomes, program graduate outcomes, teaching excellence*

## Introduction

The School of Law (SOL) at The University of the South Pacific (USP) embarked upon a curriculum alignment exercise in 2018 to align course outcomes and assessments to programme outcomes and thereby foster programme coherence. This process is associated with the School's ongoing effort to review its curriculum to ensure that the undergraduate law degree programme outcomes are context relevant and appropriate (see Penfold, 2012). This exercise was part of USP's ongoing emphasis on the quality of teaching in higher education (on the significance, see Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008). Effective teaching and learning should be based on, amongst other things, constructive alignment of teaching and assessment. The principle of constructive alignment provides a helpful foundation for designing programmes that can support effective learning and teaching. Biggs and Tang (2011) set out the key components of constructive alignment in the curriculum design process. These include the correspondence between course learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods and assessments. Constructive alignment also refers to the alignment of course learning outcomes and assessment with programme outcomes and is a process that helps to ensure coherence across a programme.

The idea of constructive alignment of teaching and learning is student-centred. It requires lecturers to ensure that they adopt teaching methods and assessments tasks that are aligned to the learning goals for students identified in the course learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The strategies for undertaking curriculum review in the SOL were determined by USP Curriculum Review and Development Plan that sets out the key phases for programme review and development. Following USP's decision to embark on curriculum review and development, the SOL curriculum alignment exercise was based on the understanding that the learning outcomes of the individual courses must be linked with the SOL programme graduate outcomes.

This article discusses the process of undertaking this curriculum alignment exercise. It begins with a discussion on curriculum alignment, then focuses on the SOL context, the alignment approach and the

result(s) achieved. The authors will draw primarily on their experiences as law lecturers in engaging with this curriculum alignment exercise.

## Curriculum Alignment

Curriculum, as defined by Watermeyer (2011, p. 6), “is a roadmap of planned educational experiences conferred to learners by their teachers.” Young (2014) describes it as structure that sets the boundaries and opportunities for the transmission of knowledge through teaching and learning. With respect to alignment, it is a:

process of linkage between individuals and events along a learning continuum by which the content of what is learnt and the relationship of the learner to this are articulated (Watermeyer, 2011, p. 4).

Generally, curriculum alignment is the relationship between learning activities, assessments and outcomes. As explained by Anderson:

curriculum alignment requires a strong link between objectives and assessments, between objectives and instructional activities and materials, and between assessments and instructional activities and materials. In other words, content validity, content coverage, and opportunity to learn are all included with the more general concept of “curriculum alignment” (Anderson, 2002, p. 257).

The linkage between “content validity, content coverage, and opportunity to learn” is described by Biggs as “constructive alignment” (see Biggs, 1996; Biggs, 2003; Biggs, 2014). Biggs explains that the “constructive aspect refers to the idea that students construct meaning through relevant learning activities” (Biggs, 2003, p. 2). The “alignment aspect refers to what the teacher does, which is to set up a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes” (Biggs, 2003, p. 2). With reference to Biggs’ concept of constructive alignment, Mills, Tivendale, Chan, and Liu note that it is critical “all parts in the teaching scheme, comprising curriculum, intended learning outcomes, and assessment tasks, are aligned with each other” (Mills, Tivendale, Chan, & Liu, 2013, p. 2).

Constructive alignment recognises “knowledge is constructed by the activities of the learner” (Biggs, 2014, p. 9). It begins “with the notion that the learner constructs his or her own meaning through relevant learning activities” (Biggs, 2014, pp. 5-6). In other words, “learning takes place through the active behaviour of the student: it is what *he* does that he learns, not what the teacher does” (Tyler, 1949, p. 63). The relationship between curriculum and assessment “drives the learning activities of the student” (Mills et al., 2013, p. 2). What this means is the teaching and learning environment is student-centred because the focus is on the desired outcome that students are meant to achieve (see Biggs, 2014).

Informed by Biggs’ conceptual framework of curriculum alignment, the authors suggest that the curriculum alignment exercise undertaken by SOL, in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education (FALE), is premised on a constructive alignment approach. The alignment exercise emphasised the importance of being clear about the alignment between USP graduate outcomes, SOL programme outcomes and individual course learning outcomes. This reflects FALE’s mission and commitment to promoting student-centred learning. Central to this system of alignment is the interface between student learning and assessments. Aligning USP graduate outcomes with SOL programme outcomes and course learning outcomes was a challenging exercise for the school. SOL had to ensure that the alignment would maintain a clear linkage across individual law courses. Also, it was a challenging exercise because the framing of the SOL curriculum, during its inception phase,

reflected the traditional model of legal education, which placed limited emphasis on alignment. Some of the participants referred to this in their responses to the process that we were undertaking, reflecting the reality that curriculum development priorities may not necessarily coincide with the priorities of a particular academic discipline.

The traditional mode of legal education, as explained by Eyes and Johnstone, has the following characteristics:

(i) teacher focused – role of teacher is to transmit their own expertise in some specific and narrow subject matter area of the law to students; (ii) concerns with the transmission of content knowledge with teaching legal rules; (iii) strong conviction that law is an autonomous discipline; quasi scientific in nature; (iv) close relationship between legal practitioners and the academy; (v) law school experience is individualised and isolating for both teachers and students. Teachers prepare and teach their subjects in isolation from each other, resulting in no direct coordination between subjects, either within any of the degree program, or between different years (Eyes & Johnstone, 2004, pp. 539-543).

Over time, the traditional model has been reformed with an emphasis on curriculum alignment (see Chesterman, 2009; Eyes & Johnstone, 2004; Witzleb & Skid, 2009). Subsequently, USP SOL has followed a similar trend; this approach recognises that curriculum alignment is crucial pedagogically because it provides the framework for quality teaching and learning (Cohen, 1987). Not only was the teaching of law at USP influenced by traditional approaches, but also by its unique history.

### USP School of Law Context

The USP SOL undergraduate degree programme started in 1994. The SOL curriculum was developed by a working group comprising representatives of USP, lawyers, judges and academics who had legal training from universities originating in other commonwealth jurisdictions. The experiences of the members of the working committee shaped the initial curriculum design; it mirrored curricula in other common law jurisdictions such as Australia and New Zealand (Penfold, 2012). This curriculum:

has been frequently updated since, generally in line with practices and requirements in other common law jurisdictions, and ensuring as far as possible that the USP LLB degree continues to be recognised in those other jurisdictions (Penfold, 2012).

At undergraduate level, SOL offers the Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree as well as combined degrees; namely, the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws (BA/LLB) and the Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Laws (BCom/LLB). These law degree programmes are targeted at those intending to become legal practitioners following successful completion of the Postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice (PDLP) and formal admission to legal practice. Additionally, USP students may undertake the Bachelor of Arts degree with a Major or Minor in Law. Many SOL students originate from the USP 12 member countries, namely: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. From time to time, students from Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia and elsewhere are also enrolled in the SOL degree programmes. With such varied student enrolments, the content of the curriculum is designed to suit the context within which South Pacific lawyers work (Penfold, 2012). This demonstrates that SOL's curriculum is framed in a way to ensure that its graduates are employable in their own local jurisdictions.

The SOL is part of USP's Faculty of Arts, Law and Education (FALE). As a school, it is located at Emalus Campus in Port Vila, Vanuatu while its department branch is in Suva at the Statham Campus near the university's Laucala Campus. SOL offers face-to-face teaching at these two localities, while students from elsewhere in the region study online through regional campuses and centres. Furthermore, SOL makes available a graduate entry-version of the LLB, i.e., students who have attained a three-year bachelor degree from USP or any other recognised university will receive credit for this and only be

required to take 25 courses as opposed to 32. At postgraduate level, SOL offers the Master of Laws (LLM), the Master of Environmental Law (MEL) and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

The quality of LLB students and graduates is an ongoing concern for SOL, FALE, regional Legal Admission Boards and judges. Such concerns provided the impetus for SOL, with the support of FALE and advice from its Programme Advisory Committee (PAC), to embark upon a curriculum review exercise. Of particular concern was the English language proficiency of the law students. A Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) was set up in 2016 to examine some of the issues relating to the curriculum. It made recommendations to address these issues and was approved by the Board of Studies in 2016 (Curriculum Development Committee, 2016). The recommendations informed the proposal to revise the first year curriculum for the LLB, which would become part of the process for reviewing and mapping the compulsory courses for the LLB programme.

### Review, Alignment and Mapping Process

The proposal to review the SOL LLB programme is linked to the current USP and FALE curriculum review initiative as well as the revision of the USP Graduate Outcomes and also revitalised the work undertaken in the earlier institutional curriculum initiatives of the Strategic Total Academic Review (STAR) and the Research Skills Development (RSD). A Curriculum Review and Development Plan was created through the Office of the DVC Education in 2017 to continue and enhance the work undertaken in these earlier initiatives. The Plan focuses on building alignment within programmes and across courses as well as creating “fit-for-purpose assessments that develop core learning outcomes and prepare students appropriately for participation in the workforce” (Spiller & Sharma, 2017). As an important prelude to the curriculum review work within programmes, the University Graduate Outcomes and rubrics were reviewed and revised in 2017. The stage was then set for initiating the Curriculum Review and Development Plan, in the first instance in FALE, including in the SOL.

### Course Outlines

Dorothy Spiller, an Assessment Consultant from the Office of Deputy Vice Chancellor Learning, Teaching & Student Services, visited Emalus Campus in early 2017 to review SOL courses. She consulted with individual academics with respect to their course outlines, reviewed them and where necessary made suggestions on how to rephrase learning outcomes. This review revealed that some of the outlines had not incorporated the revised USP Graduate Outcomes; those outlines were updated. In essence, this was a bottom-up approach because the process started with the examination of existing course outlines, commentary and suggestions for improvement. The revision of course outlines through such an approach provided an opportunity for SOL academic staff members to take ownership on how best to improve their course outlines. Such an approach made it possible to accommodate the preferences and strengths of each individual academic involved in coordinating and teaching specific subject areas of the law. This stage took place before the formalised process under the auspices of the Curriculum Review and Development Plan, but it was a good opportunity for the consultant to gain an insight into the LLB curriculum and build relationships before the collective review of the whole programme.

One of the interesting aspects of the SOL course outline review was the focus on learning outcomes. The consultant’s comments on the course learning outcomes emphasised the use of an action verb that required a particular measurement. Academics were advised not to use descriptive words that they could not assess or measure in assessments. One of these words was “understand” or “understanding”. Academics were discouraged from adopting phrases in their course learning outcomes such as: “demonstrate an understanding of the subject”; it was agreed such terminology

could not be measured. Instead, academics were encouraged to adopt words such as 'explain' because students could be assessed based on what they could explain.

The emphasis on adopting action verbs in SOL course learning outcomes differed from the conventional way of designing a course whereby '[t]eachers decided on the content they intend to teach on the programme, planned how to teach this content and then assessed the content' (Kennedy, 2007). The action verbs provide the basis for measuring the extent of learning for students. This was a new learning experience because most SOL academics tended to follow the conventional way of course design. Overall, our LLB course coordinators adapted their course outlines. This included using action verbs for learning outcomes and ensuring that they aligned with assessment activities. This step was an important enculturation process for SOL staff into an educational mindset alongside their usual disciplinary thinking. One of the challenges to this process was deciding upon the appropriate verbs from the Blooms Taxonomy that identified clear measurable learning outcomes. With Spiller's assistance, LLB course coordinators updated their course outlines. The amended course outlines were reviewed by Sean Donlan (Deputy Head of School at this time) in discussion with Eric Colvin (Head of School) and approved by SOL Board of Studies.

Following this course outline review, Spiller indicated that she wanted to review the SOL programme outcomes and the course learning outcomes with all staff. This was in line with the SOL Executive Meeting Report, which emphasised the importance of curriculum review, stating the need to:

Review existing programme outcomes in light of WSCUC, external review, PAC and other stakeholder feedback, then revise course learning outcomes & assessments and update curriculum map to reflect revised outcomes.

Continue review of the compulsory elements of the LLB curriculum, in light of the recommendations of the SOL External Review Panel, the recommendations of the SOL Program Advisory Committee, and the need to improve the English proficiency of students.

Continue review of the elective offerings in the LLB curriculum, in light of available staff resources, the recommendations of the SOL External Review Panel, and the recommendations of the SOL Program Advisory Committee (School of Law. Executive Meeting, 2017).

In addition, the SOL Programme Advisory Committee recognised the importance of this review and recommends the review of the curriculum for the upper-years of the LLB in 2018 (School of Law Program Advisory Committee, 2017). Initially, SOL intended to follow this with its own alignment and assessment analysis. FALE's decision in semester 1 2018 to proceed with a Curriculum Alignment Exercise provided the opportunity for SOL to work with FALE "to ensure the alignment between USP Graduate Outcomes, LLB Programme Outcomes, SOL Course Learning Outcomes, and SOL Assessment" (School of Law, 2018).

### Curriculum Alignment

The review of the programme and course outlines as part of FALE curriculum alignment began in February 2018 in preparation for The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). Dorothy Spiller and Dr. Yoko Kanemasu, Associate Dean Planning & Quality, FALE, visited SOL Emalus Campus to facilitate the curriculum alignment work, which was scheduled for two days. On the first day Kanemasu met with academics from SOL, School of Education (SOE) and School of Language, Arts and Media (SLAM) to discuss Learning and Teaching as well as Planning and Quality matters. Then, in the afternoon, the focus was on curriculum alignment work. The second day, Spiller conducted Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) training for those Emalus staff interested in becoming trained peer observers. This was followed by a session on curriculum

alignment. These alignment sessions provided an opportunity for academics to review the SOL graduate programme outcomes and engage in constructive discussion. This section discusses the curriculum alignment process focusing on the mapping of curriculum, particularly the alignment between programme graduate outcomes, course learning outcomes and assessments.

Aligning programme outcomes with course learning outcomes and the University graduate outcomes was a challenging exercise for the SOL, as we had to ensure that they were worded broadly enough to cover all aspects of the law courses. There was detailed discussion among the academics on what terms to adopt and the sentence structure for the programme outcomes. The facilitators solicited input from all academics regarding how best to improve the programme outcomes to ensure that they aligned with the University Graduate Outcomes. Also, the academics debated which action verbs should be adopted and how best the SOL program outcomes should be framed to align with the University Graduate Outcomes. One of the academics volunteered to immediately type the suggestions and presented them on a PowerPoint for everyone to review and make further comments before amendments were made to the program outcomes. This was a highly interactive exercise and all the law academics participated.

Another challenge was wording the SOL programme outcomes to ensure that they were broad enough to align with the University Graduate Outcomes. It was very clear that we had to devote two days as a School to get this whole exercise completed. We did not think that it would have been possible if we had not all come together and worked so hard towards it. One of the first things that the facilitators did during the initial Curriculum Alignment Session was to show FALE Emalus Campus academics a sample of the Sociology programme outcomes alignment with individual course assessments then they stepped back and provided space for discussion. Such an approach provided staff with an opportunity to interact, collaborate and work as team to discuss, review and finalise SOL programme graduate outcomes in a timely manner.

The new programme graduate outcomes target skills that are appropriate to the legal profession. These skills, however can be applied beyond the legal profession. Generally, the new programme graduate outcomes (PGO) align with the University Graduate Outcomes and are as follows:

- PGO 1:** Demonstrate knowledge of the region's laws and legal systems in their local and global context, including the role of custom;
- PGO 2:** Apply law to factual situations;
- PGO 3:** Research, analyse and argue questions of law;
- PGO 4:** Communicate legal knowledge and arguments effectively and appropriately both orally and in writing;
- PGO 5:** Demonstrate, both personally and professionally, the principles of ethics and the standards of legal professionalism; and
- PGO 6:** Assess systemic legal issues in the region and options for reform.

A table was created for each of the PGOs. The table had three columns that categorised the different achievables (benchmark, milestone and capstone) that a PGO could be measured against. Below is a table showing the first two PGOs.

**PGO1: Demonstrate knowledge of the region's laws and legal systems in their local and global context, including the role of custom**

	Benchmark (B)	Milestone (M)	Capstone (C)
Demonstrate knowledge of the region's laws and legal systems	Identifies the key laws and main features of the region's legal systems	Analyses the key laws and main features of the region's legal systems	Analyses comprehensively and critically the key laws and main features of the region's legal systems
Relate the region's laws to local and global contexts, including the role of custom	Identifies the region's laws and legal systems within a local and global context, including the role of custom	Analyses the region's laws and legal systems within a local and global context, including the role of custom	Evaluate and explain the region's laws and legal systems within a local and global context, including the role of custom

**PGO2: Apply law to factual situations**

	Benchmark (B)	Milestone (M)	Capstone (C)
Identify the material facts of a case or scenario	Recognises the material facts of a case or scenario	Analyses the material facts of a case or scenario	Analyses comprehensively and critically the material facts of a case or scenario
Select the relevant law for a case or scenario	Identifies the relevant law for a case or scenario	Analyses the relevant law for a case or scenario	Evaluate and explains the relevant law for a case or scenario
Apply the relevant law to a case or scenario	Applies the relevant law to a case or scenario	Applies the relevant law accurately to a case or scenario	Applies the relevant law accurately and reflectively to a case or scenario

The second day of the curriculum alignment work started with the reviewing of the SOL course learning outcomes. The rationale for this review was to ensure the course learning outcomes adopted the appropriate action verbs and corresponded to the revised Programme Graduate Outcomes and the University Graduate Outcomes. The use of action verbs as central variables to the framing of the course learning outcomes continued to be emphasised during the alignment sessions. Since we had already worked on the SOL programme graduate outcomes, it was easier to follow the explanation of the facilitator regarding how the course learning outcomes should be framed. The course coordinators were required to go through their courses to find out whether their course learning outcomes aligned with the programme graduate outcomes. Initially, the facilitators had a general session with all the FALE Emalus SOL, SOE and SLAM staff. Then Spiller, one of the facilitators, met with individual staff who needed assistance with their course learning outcomes.

Following the review of the programme graduate outcomes and course learning outcomes for Law and Society (LW 110), Courts and Dispute Resolution 1 and 2 (LW 111 and 113), LW 112 (Legislation), Contract 1 (LW 201), Criminal Law 1 and 2 (LW 205 and 206), Property Law 1(LW 300), Evidence (LW

307), Administrative Law (LW 309), Human Rights Law (LW 331), Pacific Land Tenure (LW 340), Law of the Sea (LW 355) and other courses, the academics then discussed alignment of the course learning outcomes with the programme graduate outcomes. Central to this discussion was the identification of what level of learning outcomes should be expected for a course in the first year as opposed to the final year. Each of the course learning outcomes was examined. The course coordinators with the help of fellow colleagues and the facilitators aligned their course learning outcomes to programme graduate outcomes then ascertained whether they were benchmark, or milestone or capstone achievable. At first, we had thought the alignment process would be a time-consuming hassle with lots of paperwork. However, we discovered working as a team with the constant support of the facilitator made the curriculum alignment task easier to accomplish. Below are some examples of the alignment of course learning outcomes with the programme graduate outcomes and the expected level of learning outcome.

#### **Criminal Law 2 - LW206 (Chella)**

1. Articulate key principles of criminal law, criminal procedure and sentencing as they have been developed in common law jurisdictions and applied in the Pacific region: PGO 1 (M)
2. Locate the sources of criminal law in the Pacific region, including statutory provisions and case authorities: PGO 3 (M)
3. Analyse the elements of specific defences, the rules relating to participation in crime, the principles and rules of criminal procedure, and the principles and rules of sentencing: PGO 2 (M)
4. Apply relevant criminal laws to resolve issues in factual problems: PGO 2 (M)
5. Communicate effective legal arguments in criminal cases: PGO 4 (M), 5 (M)

#### **Evidence - LW307 (Shah\*)**

1. Analyse comprehensively and critically the principles of Evidence Law as they have been developed in common law jurisdiction and applied in the Pacific region: PGO 1 (M), 6 (M)
2. Evaluate the relevance and admissibility of different pieces of evidence in relation to any issues raised before a court or tribunal: PGO 2 (M)
3. Articulate clearly the relevant onus and standards of proof that apply in civil and criminal litigation in the South Pacific jurisdictions: PGO 1 (M)
4. Apply relevant case law to factual scenarios within the South Pacific jurisdictions: PGO 2 (M)
5. Demonstrate advocacy skills relating to the production of evidence in courts and tribunals at a basic level: PGO 4 (M), 5 (M)
6. Conduct legal research including analysis and problem solving: PGO 2 (M) 3 (M)
7. Communicate legal research in oral and written formats using primary and secondary sources: PGO 3 (M) 4 (M), 5 (M)

#### **Administrative Law - LW 309 (Foukona)**

1. Explain the general body of legal rules which operate to control and constrain the exercise of official power by government and public decision makers: PGO 1 (M)
2. Apply specific administrative law principles to factual situations: PGO 1 (M), 2 (M)
3. Explain the role of the courts in relation to judicial review of administrative action: PGO 1 (M)
4. Evaluate the role of administrative law in maintaining public confidence in official decision making: PGO 6 (M)
5. Analyse critically the role of the courts in balancing the strict application of legal rules with the need to maintain efficient public administration: PGO 6 (M)

6. Locate important judicial decisions that contribute to the administrative law applicable to the countries of the USP region, using them in legal problem solving: PGO 1 (M), 2 (M), 3 (M)

### **Pacific International Law - LW330 (Moses)**

1. Critically discuss the nature, sources and basic principles of public international law: PGO 1 (M), 3 (M), 6 (M)
2. Critically evaluate the rationale, practicalities and values of public international law including the effectiveness and limitations of the modern international law framework in regulating relations between States, international organizations and individuals: PGO 1 (M), 6 (M)
3. Conduct independent research on issues of international law, presenting the findings in an appropriate academic format that follows legal writing and referencing conventions: PGO 3 (M), 4 (M), 5 (M)
4. Apply the rules of international law to provide solutions to hypothetical problems: PGO 2 (M), 6 (M)
5. Critically discuss the main elements of important treaties in the Pacific including human rights treaties: PGO 1 (M), 6 (M)
6. Critically analyse significant cases or statutes of Pacific Island states providing a written or oral briefing: PGO 1 (M), 6 (M)
7. Assess the efficacy of international law in the context of the legal systems of Pacific Island states at regional and domestic levels: PGO 1 (M), 6 (M)

### **The Curriculum Alignment Process**

The curriculum alignment process demanded a lot of time, attention and careful mapping of the courses offered within the law programme. Hence, during the Strategic Planning Workshop presentations, academics debated a number of key issues, facilitated by the Assessment Consultant.

Firstly, one of the discussions that attracted a lot of attention was on the use of action verbs by drawing on the Blooms' taxonomy framework and determining how these could be measured. Some academics were doubtful, while others were reserved, about the significance of using specific words or action verbs to achieve a particular measured learning outcome. Some of the course coordinators opined that a course learning outcome could still be written in a certain way and measured even without the use of an action verb. Many did not appreciate the importance of drawing upon the Blooms' taxonomy framework in order to assess a student's knowledge.

Although the idea of introducing action verbs within the wording of learning outcomes seemed straight forward, the exercise of actually selecting a specific action verb when drafting the course learning outcomes was challenging. This was because in the past many course coordinators drafted their course learning outcomes with little reflection upon the choice of wording that they adopted. Hence, the discussion on the use of action verbs pushed course coordinators to take a more pedagogical approach when drafting their course learning outcomes.

Secondly, discussions on the descriptors of standards of performance levels provided the impetus for coordinators to work together to determine milestone, benchmark and capstone levels with respect to PGOs and USP graduate outcomes. The identification of standards of performance levels for first year students as opposed to the final year students was not a straight forward exercise. The process required course coordinators to spend time examining the content of each course to identify the level of learning outcomes for each year of the law programme. The question raised was

whether milestone and benchmark should only be required of third and final year courses, while capstone should only be reserved for final year courses. The other question raised was whether milestone and capstone levels should be introduced in first year courses or whether these courses should only be assessed at benchmark level.

Following a lengthy discussion between the facilitator and course coordinators there was mutual agreement that a benchmark level is expected for first year courses. This would be the first time that most of the students would begin to learn theoretical and practical skills that were appropriate to the legal profession. The milestone level should be the indicator for second year courses, while third and final year courses should adopt both benchmark and milestone levels. Ordinarily, students continue to develop their legal skills in these years. Only in a few instances, should students be expected to achieve capstone level standards of performance, particularly in last year courses where they would be required to perform at a higher level, displaying critical thinking, research, and communication skills (Kinzie, 2013). Identifying courses within benchmark, milestone and capstone level standards of performance was a useful exercise because it provided course coordinators with a clear pedagogical mapping of the courses offered within the law program.

Finally, a discussion point raised was that the curriculum alignment process should not be adopted as a one size fits all approach. The SOL is a professional school, which involves the teaching of a particular skill set for professional legal practice. Therefore, the approach of curriculum alignment for the SOL should be considered carefully. Some academics were concerned that the University might, through this exercise, require the same level of standards of performance expected from students within the same year level across all the schools. Given the unique skill set of the law programme it was felt that SOL, offering professional degrees, should be considered differently from other the schools within the University. For instance, academics noted that High Schools across the Pacific do not offer any law courses. Hence, many of the students admitted to the law programme start to learn legal jargon and vocabulary in their very first year of university. Therefore, their expected level of standards of performance should not be compared to the performance of the students within the same year level in other schools of the University.

The discussion concluded with the academics and facilitator agreeing that the exercise of the curriculum alignment was not about comparing the achievable i.e., benchmark, milestone and capstone levels, between the schools of the University, but rather about helping course coordinators to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Academics came to understand, through this exercise, that effective learning and teaching requires not only constructive alignment of teaching and assessment, but also the alignment of the course learning outcomes with the PGOs and the USP graduate outcomes.

## Curriculum Mapping

Once the process of aligning the course learning outcomes with the programme outcomes was completed curriculum mapping was undertaken. Curriculum mapping, as explained by Dyjur and Kenny, is the “process of associating course outcomes with program-level learning outcomes and aligning elements of courses (e.g. teaching and learning activities, assessment strategies) within a program, to ensure that it is structured in a strategic, thoughtful way that enhances student learning” (Dyjur & Kenny, 2015). It is a process that is “about representing spatially the different components of the curriculum so that the whole picture and the relationships and connections between the parts of the map are easily seen” (Harden, 2001, p. 123). Veltri, Webb, Matveev and Zapatero further articulate that the “curriculum mapping process is designed to engage faculty members in a structured analysis of the extent to which program curricula intentionally and transparently integrate intended program outcomes” (Veltri, Webb, Matveev, & Zapatero, 2011, p. 33). Informed by this literature, we concur that the curriculum mapping that was introduced as part of the curriculum alignment sessions

was an important step for measuring and ensuring that “performance on assessments is a valid measure of student achievement in relation to USP and programme outcomes” (WSCUC, Information Sheet).

We consider curriculum mapping as a stocktaking process because it provided us with the opportunity to look closely at how USP graduate outcomes could be integrated into the SOL programme and all law courses. So far, SOL has mapped the first year law courses as shown in the table, below:

<b>Graduate Outcomes and Programme Graduate Outcomes</b>	<b>LW110</b>	<b>LW111</b>	<b>LW112</b>	<b>LW113</b>
Pacific Consciousness/PGO 1	B	B/M	B/M	
Creativity/PGO 2	B	B	B	
Critical thinking and quantitative reasoning/PGO2	B	B	B	
Creativity/PGO 3	B	B	B/M	
Critical thinking and quantitative reasoning/PGO3	B	B	B/M	
Communication (written and oral)/PGO4	B	B	M	B/M
Ethics/PGO5	B/M	M	M	B/M
Professionalism/PGO5	B/M	M	M	B/M
Pacific Consciousness/PGO 6	B			
Teamwork				

The table is a matrix showing the alignment of USP graduate outcomes, programme graduate outcomes and first year law courses learning outcomes. The mapping exercise is still a work in progress.

## Conclusion

We compliment the SOL, with the support of FALE, for providing us with the opportunity to review our course learning outcomes and the programme outcomes. Our Head of School and fellow colleagues have been very helpful in guiding each other throughout this process. The collaborative interaction and exchange of ideas on how to improve the curriculum among staff members has been commendable. One of the positive aspects about the SOL academics is that they are always eager and ready to help each other and work together to ensure that there is quality of learning. This was demonstrated during the curriculum review process. Ultimately, this makes the working environment more enjoyable and refreshing. The facilitators, Spiller and Kanemasu, contributed a lot by supporting and guiding us through the curriculum review process. The strength of this process is the fact that it offered academics an opportunity to rethink how best to improve teaching and learning and take ownership of the process. Once we completed revisions to the programme graduate outcomes and course learning outcomes, we realised that curriculum alignment was not as difficult as we had envisaged. However, it challenged us to pay attention to discipline content at the taught and assessed levels. It was an enriching experience working together as a team to ensure there was curriculum alignment. Curriculum review is a positive strategy for improving the quality of teaching and learning. We perceive curriculum alignment and mapping as vital educational tools that we were able to review and revise within a limited timeframe. This was an achievement for SOL. There is still much curriculum work that is needed to be done. The next process will involve alignment of assessments.

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## Concluding and Continuing Curriculum Review and Development Work

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This special issue of *Directions* presents reflections upon an extended round of curriculum review and development, conducted by particular academics and administrators, at a particular institution, at a particular time. In 2017, the University of the South Pacific undertook its second major curriculum review initiative of the decade, following (though not directly continuing from) the Strategic Total Academic Review project (STAR), which had commenced in 2010. As would be expected from a large group of academics across diverse disciplines, there were a range of responses. But it is fair to say that in many sections, the team tasked with facilitating the curriculum review process met with a staff already experiencing a considerable amount of administrative fatigue. That the final experiences recorded in this special issue are generally positive is a testament to the patience and dedication of the curriculum review team, and the willingness of academics to rise to what was in some quarters perhaps an unwelcome challenge.

In some disciplines, particularly where there was continuity with the STAR project, things seem to have run relatively smoothly from the start. As reported by Yoko Kanemasu, Tui Rakuita and Andreas Kopf in their contribution to this volume, academic staff in their discipline approached the latest curriculum review process with aplomb, supported by school-level workshops, structured reporting, and a stable roster of retained STAR trainers. With continuous administrative support, group discussions seem not to have questioned the value of the curriculum review process in itself, but to have considered how it may best be made to work for a Pacific-oriented curriculum.

Elsewhere, there was stronger resistance. As Ann Cheryl Armstrong, Ledua Waqailiti and Vulori Sarai report, curriculum review activities were seen by some in their school as ‘irrelevant’ or ‘a waste of time’, and while progress could be made with the curriculum review team present, once they departed, ‘havoc happened’. In a reactionary setting, it may not be a coincidence that the authors describe a gendered dimension to this disunity, with a ‘men’s club’ mentality undervaluing the contributions of the female academics on the team. Yet when three women academics—each with their own preconceptions on the process, from open enthusiasm, to overburdened reluctance—came together with the curriculum development team, they discovered an ‘enriching process’ that helped the academic to ‘enjoy teaching’, and the student to enjoy ‘improved exam results’. One author’s resolve to pass on her experience of curriculum review to trainee teachers indicates a lasting benefit that goes beyond the immediate aims of the exercise.

If an institutionally driven curriculum review activity appeared in some contexts as an intrusion upon fixed orders, elsewhere it was a formality that seemed to distract from the substantial work already underway. Fiona Willans details her experience of an earlier phase of curriculum work—still connected with STAR, and, tellingly, introduced at the time as ‘curriculum mapping’ rather than ‘curriculum review’ or ‘development’—and cautions against paperwork exercises that require staff to fill in tables without any serious explanation of their purpose. Against this superficial approach, Willans presents three cases in which curriculum mapping has provided what she sees as genuinely value to programmes at three different stages of development: the initial planning phase, when the broad social aims behind a programme’s conception must be refined into realisable, complementary outcomes; a later, transitional phase, when a programme has been pulled out of alignment by the different conceptions of successive coordinators over a number of years; and a still later phase, where dwindling student numbers suggest that a programme is, for whatever reason, no longer meeting the

requirements of prospective students. Willans shows that curriculum mapping was a vital part of the conception and/or development of these programmes, reminding us that curriculum review is an essential part of academic life, and that it can work effectively within functioning disciplines regardless of managerial agendas.

Willans concludes her reflection upon the earlier round of curriculum mapping by calling upon the institution to 'see beneath the admin and recognise a truly valuable and ongoing exercise', suggesting that her experience has left lasting reservations about institutional commitment to the process. It is reassuring that the article by Joseph D. Foukona, Morsen Mosses, Sofia S. Shah and Jessie Chella, reflecting on the 2017–19 round of curriculum review conducted in the School of Law, suggests much progress in this respect has already been made. It was clearly not without its challenges. As the authors explain, there are real disciplinary reasons for the initial scepticism of some of their colleagues. Historically, legal education has remained close to the traditional tertiary pedagogical model, where individual experts maintain ownership of particular courses reflecting their special areas of expertise, and students go from class to class with little 'direct coordination between subjects'. Times were changing even before the school undertook the curriculum review and development work in 2018, but as the authors note, the received pedagogy has remained in many ways at odds with the constructivist principles that underpin curriculum alignment.

If traditional legal education could be 'isolating for both teachers and students', this sense has perhaps been compounded at USP by the geographical location of the School of Law. Based at Emalus Campus, Vanuatu, staff have with some justification felt removed from executive decision-making at the main campus in Suva. In this context, it is understandable that staff may have interpreted the 2017–19 curriculum review process as yet another imposition from senior management, in which they had little say. That Foukona, Mosses, Shah and Chella describe a procedure that was ultimately productive and empowering is a testament to the independence of the school, and a sign that top-down requests can be met with a 'bottom-up approach', where staff members 'take ownership on how best to improve their course[s]'.

Under this model, formalised curriculum work is a dialogic process, initiated by senior management, guided and documented by the curriculum development team, and enacted within the disciplines by academics on the ground. The experience described by Law academics show that such a dialogic approach can satisfy the various needs of the different—to adopt the contemporary managerial parlance—stakeholders. The university achieves its desired outcome: a working curriculum map, showing that the courses constituting a given academic programme combine to produce the graduates the university claims it produces, verifiable through a series of aligned assessments. The school maintains ownership of its programmes at every level, and—collaborating with the curriculum development team and representatives from the faculty—experience active involvement in university initiatives. At the same time, faculty representatives gain a greater understanding of the peculiarities of a particular discipline, and, in the specific case of the School of Law, a refined understanding of the importance of precise language in curriculum work. Here, then, Law appears not as an old-fashioned discipline which has to 'catch up' with the rest of the university, but as a valued and valuable contributor to an institutional process.

Foukona, Mosses, Shah and Chella report a change in the school's understanding of this process, from the initial perception of a 'time-consuming hassle with lots of paperwork', to an 'enriching experience working together as a team to ensure there was curriculum alignment'. It is this process of 'changing minds and hearts' that Dorothy Spiller, Ann Cheryl Armstrong and Sujlesh Sharma discuss in their contribution to this special issue. Surveying USP academics' perceptions of curriculum development work, they reflect on the different narratives that academics bring to curriculum review, corroborating the range of views presented in the articles of this special issue. Spiller, Armstrong and Sharma observe

that one of the more stubborn narratives is the view that managerial initiatives are encroachments upon the 'real or imagined university culture of the past'. While the authors are sensitive to the experiences that underlie this narrative, they rightly conclude that it is not in itself productive, tending towards the maintenance of the status quo, and remaining incompatible with the continual self-reflection and development that must form the heart of curriculum development. Noting the generally positive accounts of academics reporting 'the enjoyment of participation and working collectively', they call for greater commitment from the university management in terms of 'how they involve the academic community'.

Spiller, Armstrong and Sharma acknowledge that the 2017–19 round of curriculum development was driven by senior management, 'against the backdrop of an institution-wide accreditation process'. However, they point out that it was from the start also intended to foster self-sustaining Communities of Practice, with disciplines maintaining 'collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need'. The articles comprising this special issue suggest that such ambitions will be most valuable for those programmes where either the curriculum has fallen well out of alignment, or where staff are for whatever reason disengaged from the commitment to continual self-reflection and re-evaluation of the curriculum. The process may be less transformative for those programmes already operating with strong, discipline-based COP, where the involvement of an institutionally directed team may be taken as an interference, or a rehashing of an already well-thought-out alignment. Yet even here, it may not be without use, since academics in these programmes will likely have ideas that can be usefully shared with others in the university, via the curriculum development team.

There is no denying that the requirement for yet more reporting and documentation can be a burden to a programme where serious, targeted curriculum revision is already underway. However, in my experience of the 2017–19 round of curriculum review, we received considerable administrative support in updating and maintaining the documentation. In my own discipline, Literature, I have twice been involved with curriculum review at USP. The first time, at the tail-end of the STAR project in 2013–15, I was tasked with mapping the programme; without any clear explanation of the purpose or the process, and still less any institutional or administrative support, I conducted the work largely alone. It was, unsurprisingly, a distracting and largely meaningless exercise, producing documentation that was, I am sure, scarcely read by anyone, and which had little effect on the programme as a whole. The second time, in 2017–19, I worked as part of a team, comprising most of the Literature staff, an Assessment and Curriculum Consultant, and a Curriculum Review Coordinator. This time round, I found it truly productive. The questions and suggestions posed by the curriculum development team encouraged us to reflect upon and revise the aims of specific courses, and their place within the programme as a whole; to reconsider the function of particular assignments within courses, ensuring the distribution of a suitable range of assessment types across the programme; and to generate collegial cooperation in developing our understanding of the function of the Literature programme, moving away from the maintenance of largely discrete courses, as had been the norm.

The emphasis was upon the process rather than the report—the territory rather than the map—and it was this that made it for me a valuable and productive experience. Yet I also felt considerable administrative relief, especially when compared with the previous round. Against our busy timetables, it was the Curriculum Review Coordinator who scheduled our meetings and kept us accountable to the process. And in the meetings, while the team discussed and adjusted assessment, course and programme components, it was the Curriculum Review Coordinator who recorded all changes as we went; after each meeting, she would produce clean copies of the latest rubrics, outcomes and map. This meant that the paperwork was done for us, while we concentrated on the big picture, the alignment of the programme as a whole—surely the academic's ideal scenario.

My experience of the 2017–19 curriculum review process, is consistent with those described in the contributions to this special issue of *Directions*, suggesting that a centrally driven initiative can work well, so long as academics are given ownership of the procedure, and encouraged to accept it as a formalisation of an inherently valuable process, rather than a distraction from that process. However, in the specific context of the University of the South Pacific, ownership is not only a matter of personal academic preference. Beginning in 2017, the curriculum work discussed in this special issue came in a period of institutional transition. On the one hand, half a century from its founding by Royal Charter, USP has come some way in decolonising its curricula and embedding Pacific values within university life. In 1997, Epeli Hau'ofa founded the Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies. Since then, 'Pacific consciousness' has been institutionally validated as an expected outcome for undergraduate and postgraduate students, with all programmes required to demonstrate how they contribute to this outcome. In 2012, the Centre's Pacific Worlds course was made compulsory for all undergraduate students, and in 2018 it launched a BA Major in Pacific Studies, Heritage and Arts. In this respect, the university is doing more than ever to honour the 'cultural heritage and diversity of Pacific societies', as stated in the university's formalised graduate outcomes.

At the same time, the university aspires—again, more than ever before—towards international recognition, ranking and accreditation. Across the past decade in particular, senior management have introduced a number of reviews, consultancies, workshops and programmes that were implicitly or explicitly intended to bring the university in line with international standards and practices. It must be said that, at least in the early days, not all of these initiatives were carefully explained to staff at all levels, and my experience of corridor conversations in the early part of the 2010s suggest that if there was an overarching strategy behind these projects, it was not well understood on the ground. It must also be said that greater unification was felt from around 2016, when the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) mobilised a range of well-explained measures, culminating in 2018 with the university's accreditation under the US-based accreditor WSUSC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission).

The two drives—towards Pacific-oriented curricula and practices, and international standards and accreditation—are not in themselves incompatible, but they have sometimes been at tension. As Armstrong, Waqailiti and Sarai report here, part of the resistance to the 2017–19 curriculum development project felt in their school stemmed from staff 'not liking the fact that other people were telling us to do this exercise', because 'from a Pacific island perspective, there are those of us who don't take too kindly for those from outside telling us what to do'. The university administration has a history of bringing in outside consultants to instruct on things that academics felt were being doing very well already, or to present general principles that may not have spoken to our particular situations.

The positive experiences outlined in this special issue are evidence that this feeling can be overcome, if the consultant is sympathetic to this context, and responsive to academics' needs and concerns. But with Pacific pedagogies, philosophies and methodologies so often marginalised within Pacific education generally, and the university specifically, there is also an understandable suspicion of educational practices and principles brought in from the outside. This suspicion is perhaps compounded when these practices arrive as part of the institutional push towards global recognition. The curriculum development work described in this special issue was not directly initiated as part of the bid for WSUSC accreditation, though the two processes did coalesce in the reporting, but the language of the curriculum development work covered here—constructivism, curriculum alignment, and so on—are the dominant terms in contemporary pedagogical discourse, and may therefore bear connotations of globalising trends that are blind to Pacific pedagogical traditions.

Yet as Kanemasu, Rakuita and Kopf point out in their article here, there is no inherent incompatibility between Pacific modes and ‘outside’ pedagogies or technologies. And while the introduction of the latter takes place in situated conditions, where various factors—technological, cultural, institutional, disciplinary—shape and delimit what can be done with them, the history of ‘formal’ education in the Pacific is the history of Pacific ingenuity in adapting imposed practices to meet local requirements. It is telling that Konai Helu Thaman—who has done more than anyone else in the university to argue for the importance of Pacific epistemologies in Pacific tertiary education—is the one academic named by Armstrong, Waqailiti and Sarai as having already been actively working towards both curriculum development and alignment, and a functioning Community of Practice, long before this curriculum review initiative was underway. This illustrates the importance of Kanemasu, Rakuita and Kopf’s caution against the oversimplification of complex cultural and pedagogical developments into a simple binary that would separate Pacific practice from ‘outside’ influences. Pacific educators have ample experience of incorporating, adapting and indigenising all manner of modes and materials, according to present Pacific needs.

Ownership is therefore paramount, whether we think at the level of the postcolonial region—instilling and maintaining Pacific principles in a globalised educational context—or the academic programme, retaining disciplinary agency in an institutionally driven process of revision. The experiences reflected in this special issue show that in either case, the university has an important role to play. It has a responsibility to honour the commitment to Pacific needs stated in its university graduate outcomes, integrating ‘traditional and contemporary practices to sustain Pacific societies’. It is also a reality that the university has to compete with other institutions, across the member countries and internationally, and it may do so by playing to its unique strengths and potentials—certainly by supporting disciplines such as Pacific Studies, Marine Studies and Pacific Languages, but also by truly embedding Pacific values, epistemologies and experiences into curricula and campus life. Curriculum review and development, including mapping and alignment, has the potential to perform at both levels, providing the documentation needed by accreditors, national higher education authorities, and other partners, while driving the self-reflection and development needed to ensure that our programmes remain properly responsive to the Pacific societies the university serve.

As described above, I have gone through two centralised rounds of curriculum review at USP. The first round focussed primarily upon the map, requiring a particular job by a particular deadline, without informing why it was needed or what would be done with it. It produced the report, but no self-reflection. The second round, with the support of the curriculum review team, allowed for discussions that led to serious reflection within the discipline, refining our assessments and courses towards real improvements in the programme. The documentation was secondary, but the careful mapping of these courses was handled through the administrative support provided for in the centralised process—a relief not to be underestimated when deadlines are so many. Given the success of this round, as recorded by the contributors to this special issue, the university might wish to consider the establishment of a permanent Curriculum Development Unit. A glance through other university websites will show that this is a standard feature for universities of a comparable size, and while it would, to my knowledge, be the first of its kind in the Pacific Islands, this may be one of those measures that help USP to stand out from its regional counterparts.

With or without a formal Curriculum Development Unit, for the university to sustain the goodwill and momentum recorded in this special issue of *Directions* as it extends the curriculum review process to other programmes, it has a duty to invest—perhaps in resources and staff, but, most fundamentally, in the process rather than the report. The articles presented here demonstrate what can be achieved when this investment is made, and offer a valuable resource towards the planning and preparation for this next stage.

