

EQUITY IN, AND ACCESS TO, WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION? SOME ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS¹

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Introduction

I would like to thank the conference organisers for inviting me to share with you experiences from our region on the conference theme of *Learning Together*. In this context, I was asked to focus on issues of equity and access, as these apply to the Pacific Islands, a region characterised by cultural diversity, geographic fragmentation and isolation, and economic dependence; a region which, in global terms, is described as the hole in the Asia/Pacific doughnut (Fry 1996: 305). As far as most of us who live in these islands are concerned, our region is that uniquely diverse place that we call home because it has sustained us and our ancestors for millennia.

During the past few years it has become fashionable for educators both within and beyond the region, to discuss education in and for the 21st century. This was a topic of the conference which I was invited to address a few weeks ago in Melbourne. Participants from over 60 countries discussed the recently released Report of a World Commission on Education for the 21st Century, otherwise known as the Delors Report, entitled: *Learning: The Treasure Within*. This Report is about what it refers to as the four **pillars** of learning, namely, learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together; and learning to be.

What became apparent at the conference was the vital role that education will need to play in ensuring that human life as we know it today is satisfactorily sustained, both locally as well as globally. This means that those of us who have some responsibility for the education of future generations will need to seriously question some very basic

assumptions concerning what we have been doing and what we plan for the future, in the context of an increasingly changing and unpredictable world.

As an educator and a Pacific islander, I have, for the past twenty years or so, been concerned with both teaching and learning in the Pacific Islands, and this forum provides an opportunity to share with you some of my concerns in relation to the issues of equity and access, and to learn from you of ways in which these concerns might be addressed. In doing so, I will first look at the role of the University of the South Pacific in providing greater and more equitable access to education for Pacific Island learners; the kind of education to which access is being encouraged; and finally I will examine the need to address and to understand the cultural contexts in which these educational provisions are made.

A Regional Educational Provider

The University of the South Pacific (USP), the regional university where I work, (and one of only two regional universities in the world) was established thirty years ago, with a unique mission, namely to provide for the educational and training needs of 11 (now 12) member Island countries (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu). The USP region has a total population of about 1.4 million on a sea of islands covering some 32 million square kilometres of ocean. Although the region is one of the most culturally diverse, geographically isolated and fragmented areas in the world, the common experience of European colonialism and its concomitant educational values and practices, including the languages, have resulted in the evolution of an education system which is largely Eurocentric in outlook, academic in orientation and culturally undemocratic in its learning environments. This is the environment into which the USP was born.

As most of you know, by the beginning of this century almost all the islands of the Pacific Ocean were colonies of metropolitan powers, who, for various obvious reasons, not the least of which was cultural

transformation, introduced formal education in the form of schools. However, opportunities for formal education have always been limited in a region where schooling has a relatively recent history and where post-secondary education was for the privileged and more advantaged of island populations. Indeed, before the establishment of the USP in 1968, most Pacific Island students had to leave their homes in order to attend high school and virtually all had to leave their home islands in order to pursue university and other tertiary level studies.

For nearly thirty years now, the USP has tried to make education more accessible to more people, and its distribution more equitable in the region that it serves. The geographically fragmented and isolated nature of the island countries made the development of distance education a high priority from the beginning. In this development, the USP was fortunate in being able to pioneer satellite communication technology to enhance and further develop its distance teaching and learning programmes. This development opened up new opportunities to groups of students who could not or did not wish to participate in conventional education, because of an accident of geography or birth, or the cost of attending schools and/or university, or simply failure to reach the cut-off points.

Over the past three decades, over 11,000 students have graduated with formal qualifications from the university, and thousands more have been able to access both credit and non-credit programmes. They have included people in full-time employment, particularly civil servants, and housewives, as well as school leavers. At the USP we like to think that our distance and continuing education programmes are an important part of the democratisation of education, particularly given the university requirement that all learners be treated equally with respect to content, assessment and accreditation.

The twelve island governments that support the USP are fully committed to its future development and, despite their own economic difficulties, they provide over 70% of the total recurrent budget. Because most of our member countries have a shortage of qualified people, and limited educational opportunities to meet the demand

for a highly skilled work force, they see the university as a major provider of much-needed human resources as they attempt to reform and restructure their economies.

However, despite relative increases in governments' expenditures on higher education, the fact remains that only a very small proportion of people (fewer than 5%) are able to access higher education institutions, either in their own countries, where these exist, or in Rim countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the U.S.A. As mentioned earlier, until the establishment of the USP, most Pacific Island students went outside the region for further studies. Today, through its programmes offered on its three campuses in Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu, as well as through distance study, the USP is helping member countries to provide education to more people at relatively lower costs compared to overseas institutions, although some island nations have continued to send students outside the region.

Recently we have witnessed some overseas institutions offering programs in USP member countries. The services they provide range from distance education courses to ones supported by resident tutors. Some courses, particularly vocational ones, are offered through existing national post-secondary institutions. In an increasingly deregulated and competitive environment, we anticipate more overseas-based educational institutions to establish themselves in the Pacific Islands. Most of them are profit-oriented, targeting a small but influential and affluent clientele. Their programmes are usually in the areas of business and commerce, with curricula imported from metropolitan home countries, and little effort to adapt to Pacific contexts. This is in contrast to efforts by national and regional institutions such as the USP, committed to developing educational programs that are appropriate to the needs, contexts and perspectives of Pacific peoples.

What Kind of Education?

Globalisation has increasingly influenced educational development in our region as elsewhere. Recent international events and trends in the last ten years have caused us to focus our thinking on education

in general and formal education in particular. For example, the United Nation's designated *World Decade for Culture* (1987-1997), as well as other UN-sponsored initiatives, have contributed in significant ways to some soul searching and critical examination of what has been happening in education in our island countries. More recently, with the push from industrialised nations for market-driven economies and educational development, awareness of and concern about issues such as cross-cultural transfer, globalised curricula and appropriate learning strategies, have become more urgent. Recent developments in information technology and the expanding potential for international practices that assume cultural neutrality in these and other western-derived ideas and practices present some real challenges to educationists. In the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual learning environments that characterise our region, such issues have always been central to us but they have become more serious with the recent rush by some Pacific Rim universities and organisations to package education and offer it as another purchasable commodity in what is claimed to be a market and consumer-driven world.

This is the context then, in which the USP attempts to provide its member countries with relevant and cost-effective education, particularly higher education. In doing so, however, we are quite aware of the fact that in most Pacific Island Countries (PICs), as in most post-colonial situations, access to the prime sites of power whether in the law, media or education lies predominantly with white, male, middle class or other privileged groups (Wilkin 1997: 236). While this phenomenon has been clearly challenged (but not significantly changed) in western industrial nations, it has not been seriously discussed in our region until recently. In the context of education, the challenge is not necessarily aimed at a white or a middle class group per se, but rather at a western, middle class type of education and pedagogy, which, for over a hundred years, has not recognised the way Pacific people communicate, think and learn: an education that has, over this period, devalued and de-emphasised the very ideas and beliefs that underpinned Pacific indigenous/vernacular education systems in which the majority of Pacific island learners continue to be socialised.

Since political independence, PICs have tried to reform their school curricula in an attempt to make their content more relevant and meaningful for students. Success in this area has been limited, as models of curriculum development have not been adequately adapted to the cultural contexts of schools, an issue which will persist as dependence on overseas finance and consequently foreign curriculum consultants continue (Thaman 1990).

During the last ten years, however, regional discussion on education has shifted its focus to teachers and teacher educators and their role in helping reduce what Little (1995) refers to as the 'cultural gap' between on the one hand the culture and expectations of schooling and the school curriculum, and on the other hand the home cultures of learners. This can be done by attempting to better contextualise their teaching, and facilitating more culturally democratic learning environments.

This is seen as necessary because schooling has failed and is failing most Pacific Island learners, who like myself, have had to endure the conflicting demands and expectations of their home cultures and those of their formal education. Those who live in urbanising environments or away from their source cultures have been forced into codes of conduct, metaphysical belief systems and economic activities that are more typical of metropolitan cultures than the cultures of the majority of their home island or rural compatriots, who, ironically, continue to see formal education as a panacea that will open up endless possibilities, provide for social mobility and self-discovery, and contribute to community and national development.

For most of our students, these have proven to be unrealistic expectations. Schools have not delivered and will not deliver the goods that most people expect them to. Our schools are increasingly turning out more failures than successes. Tatafu (1997), for example, estimates that in Tonga, fewer than 10% of students who start Form 1 will be successful in obtaining a School Certificate in Year 11. In a country where success in school is a major indicator of *poto* (or the ideal person in Tongan society) this finding is an indictment of the

education system. Worse still, because school curricula in most PICs are academic and geared to university study, most school leavers will have learnt little that is of practical value to them in the contexts of their own societies. For example, most will not know the uses, let alone the names, of their plants and animals, or how to fish or pursue agricultural practices - knowledge which once formed the basis for the subsistence affluence that gave many Oceania societies their cultural and economic resilience (Fisk 1972), and which may remain as the foundation for sustainable living in most Pacific societies throughout the 21st century. We cannot expect Pacific islanders, as the International Community does, to protect and conserve their environments, if they no longer understand them or are bent on destroying them for a quick dollar. Too many educated people today, including graduates of our universities, are showing signs of what Dickson once called systematised selfishness, a predicament that must have caused an uncle of mine to complain to me that his educated sons were treating him like rubbish.

Worse still, the continued dominance of a western educational model of teaching and learning could, in my view, both directly and indirectly lead many Pacific Island people to think that the wisdom of their own cultures is worthless or at least irrelevant to modern educational development. Indeed, indigenous/vernacular cultures and languages are often seen by many Pacific Island people as obstacles to learning and modern development, a myth planted by many early educators and perpetuated by teachers and educationists.

Two years ago, an Asian Development Bank study revealed, among other things, that the quality of primary and secondary education in PICs is declining; a large proportion of well-educated and well-qualified people continue to leave their island countries for perceived greener pastures overseas; the economic and social returns for educational investment are poor; and, generally speaking, education systems in PICs are expensive, wasteful and of poor quality (ADB, 1996: 27). Formal education, it seems, has not contributed to the development and improvement of Pacific peoples and their environment but to their potential and eventual demise.

The concern about equity and access in education in PICs, in my view, needs to be seen in the context of a wider concern about the relevance and cultural appropriateness of the type of education and training that is made available to Pacific peoples. A curriculum, as Lawton (1975) suggests, is a selection of the best of a culture, the transmission of which is so important that we cannot leave it to chance. Yet formal education curricula in our region could be seen as selections of the best of other peoples' cultures, rather than those of Pacific Island learners and/or the teachers (Thaman 1993b). This was the reality that faced Pacific educationists and curriculum personnel at a UNESCO-sponsored sub-regional seminar held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, in 1991. At this meeting, participants reaffirmed the need for all PICs to incorporate important cultural knowledge, skills and values in school curricula as a way of ensuring that they better reflected the cultures and environments of both students and teachers. There was agreement that Pacific educators should work together to ensure that the curricula at all levels of formal education take into consideration the cultural milieu in which learners are socialised, as disregard for this would hinder their ability to benefit from schooling and/or develop positive cultural identities (Teasdale and Teasdale 1992).

In 1992, shortly after the Rarotonga meeting, members of the Pacific Association of Teacher Educators (PATE) met at the USP in Fiji, and agreed upon the need for Pacific educators to theorise their own education and to develop more culturally sensitive frameworks for teaching and learning, ones that better reflect the best of their collective cultures. I made suggestions as to how the cultural contexts of teaching and learning in PICs might provide the basis for developing a more relevant and meaningful Pacific philosophy of teaching and learning, and suggested the use of the Tongan metaphor of *Kakala*, which involves the collection, making and giving of fragrant garlands to different recipients, as a starting point from which a Pacific philosophy and methodology of teaching and learning could be derived (Thaman 1993).

Three years later, PATE members agreed to undertake major reviews of their own teacher education programmes with a view to changing

them and making them more culturally democratic. In 1997, a major collaborative research project was undertaken by PATE members, with funds provided by the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States, and managed by the USP's Institute of Education. The project aims to find out the extent to which teacher educators contextualise course content, methodologies and assessment techniques through valuing and using knowledge, skills and strategies derived from Pacific cultures. Preliminary analyses of responses from teaching staff suggest that many teacher educators need resources and assistance in order to enhance their abilities in this area. In my view, attempts to improve teaching and learning need to include teachers and teacher educators, as efforts to change the content of a curriculum will come to nought if teachers neither share the philosophy nor understand their role in the education process.

This is because most teachers in our region, including myself, have, for many years, blindly accepted the educational philosophies, methodologies and psychology of the learner and learning that we were taught at universities and teachers' colleges, often despite our own knowledge and experiences to the contrary. Fortunately, some of us are now critically questioning these. In my role as a teacher educator, I try to facilitate this through my own teaching about the conflicting emphases of formal education and Pacific vernacular systems of education. Students taking my course on *Educational Theories and Ideas*, as well as examining western-derived educational theories and ideas, are provided with the opportunity to closely examine their own vernacular educational ideas, in order to discover not only their relevance for their own teaching and learning but also for the potential of the best of these ideas to be incorporated into mainstream programmes and courses to complement existing trends and widen the range of alternatives available to them.

Using the method of Conceptual Analysis, students examine their own vernacular languages of education, particularly notions of learning, knowledge and wisdom. In doing so, many begin to see the differences between the underlying philosophy of schooling and that of vernacular/indigenous education, and thus move towards a better

understanding of their own learning and teaching difficulties. They also discover how formal education has affected or seriously distorted the definition of the educated person in Pacific Island societies and how Pacific notions of wisdom had to be expanded to include not only the process of schooling but also its achievement. My own study of Tongan notions of learning, knowledge and wisdom revealed that the concept of *poto*, or the ideal/smart person, refers to those who use *'ilo* (knowledge and skills), acquired through *ako* (learning) for the benefit of the groups to which they belong, and with which they identify. Such notions reflect basic Tongan cultural values and emphases which people continue to use to justify their behaviour as well as that of others. These include emphases on: the supernatural and spiritual; context-specific behaviour; kinship and interpersonal relationships; conformity to group norms; *`ofa* (compassion); and restraint behaviour. Originally associated with simply knowing what to do and doing it well in the context of Tongan culture, *poto* has been reconceptualised to include the processes as well as the achievement of schooling so that, today, we cannot talk about *poto* in Tonga without talking about success in formal education.

In a post-graduate course I teach, *Culture and Education*, the students focus on the historical processes through which schooling has evolved in Pacific Island societies, its structure as well as its pedagogy. They examine learning and human development theories upon which school and school curricula continue to be based and informed by, for example, theories which rely on a biological model of interaction that views the person as a distinct, genetically determined, self-actualising individual, as opposed to those theories, characteristic of most Pacific Island cultures, of a person defined through his/her interaction in different social contexts (Linnekin and Poyer 1990).

In this, as in the other course, students begin to see how the wholesale importation of values and practices associated with formal education destroyed the very values that underpinned indigenous/ vernacular education and how these imported values and practices served to disempower many people, especially older people. Of course this trend continues today as we face the process of

globalisation and the mass export of the cultural practices and values of the industrialised and post-industrialised world, including their languages, communication and entertainment networks and non-sustainable consumerism, a trend which UNESCO has warned may well produce a sense of dispossession and loss of identity among those who are exposed to it (Teasdale 1997: 1).

Students are also encouraged to critically examine the concepts of science and liberal education, which most of them take for granted. What they discover, of course, is the misleading and unproven assumption that an academic education is culture-free, and occupies a kind of ideologically neutral high ground, an assumption that is at best naive and at worst arrogant, because scientific and liberal beliefs and values, like all beliefs and values, are embedded in a particular cultural curriculum and agenda (Vine 1992: 169-210).

In discussing liberal education, I recognise the tension between liberal notions of the primacy of individual liberty and the importance of collective and communal emphases, including gender considerations. For example, recent policies of educational restructuring here and in New Zealand, neighbours to whom many Pacific educators turn for educational and other advice, have been interpreted by left-wing critics as demonstrating a shift to the Right, in that the socialist or collectivist ideals of the past fifty years are seen as having been superseded by the competitive individualism of today's New Right. Yet, from the perspective of non-western cultures, including the Pacific Islands, and particularly from the perspective of women, both versions may be described as Eurocentric and androcentric. The rational, competitive individual of western liberal thought is often seen as male and white. Furthermore, the education policies advocated by many foreign consultants and experts have been usually informed by functionalism, a model of society which assumes the primacy of a patriarchal, nuclear (instead of extended) family as the basis of social cohesion and policies, a model which constitutes, for many Pacific islanders, especially women, a contradiction between their intellectual, social and professional development and their sexuality (Middleton 1992).

Challenges in Distance Education

At the institutional level, our university is concerned about the impact not only of the content of the education we provide but also its mode of delivery. This is particularly so with our distance education offerings. As some of you know, Pacific Islanders traditionally learned from one another, through their interaction with each other as well as with their environment. Teacher/learner relationships were intimate ones where doing, listening, observing, and imitating were basic means of learning. Even in schooling, the vernacular notion of the teacher as one who has already done the necessary learning continues to exist among learners today, even though new practices recently championed by curriculum personnel are based on the assumption that the teacher does not have all the required information and knowledge and must only be a **facilitator** of learning. Consequently, the notion of the learner who is independent of a teacher is a relatively difficult one for many people to appreciate. At our university we have found that most of our distance learners continue to request personal contact with tutors, despite attempts by instructional designers to make learning materials completely 'stand alone'.

Another issue relates to the mode of delivery that we have been using. As you all know, in distance education, geography - as distance and its impact - is seen as having been conquered by modern technology in the form of print and electronic media, making the physicality of place irrelevant to social interaction. Over the satellite we can be transported to any number of our member countries without ever being in them. With new electronic media the traditional sense of place, normally emphasised by Pacific people, is lost and an artificial sense of being is introduced. We are aware that such a loss of geographic centredness or 'place' is a feature of modernising cultures but in our region it may mean that some people can become disoriented because where people are physically will no longer determine who and where they are socially (Meyrowitz 1985: 115).

In relation to the content of our courses, more lecturers now recognise the need to better contextualise their teaching materials by including

more Pacific content in their courses. Recent advances in ethnoscience, ethnobiology, ethnomathematics and folk taxonomy are increasingly becoming important and have much to offer course writers and developers, particularly in the sciences and mathematics, and the use of field-based studies in the social sciences will enhance not only course relevance but students' own knowledge of the local environment. Moreover, using their own environments and societies as 'living laboratories' can also serve to create greater and more equitable access to these important 'educational facilities' (Thaman 1997). In the area of psychology, the inclusion of Pacific cultural notions and practices would allow not only for a widening of the frame of reference but may also help reveal where beliefs and practices of the home cultures of students might be at odds with those of lecturers and course writers. Education courses on the other hand will be much enhanced by writers using students' knowledge and experiences as bases for learning new concepts and skills. Valuing Pacific notions of education and including these as legitimate areas of study in the curriculum will not only enhance students' understanding of their own education but can also provide the message that their own cultures and languages are worthy of study at the highest levels of formal education.

A third area that needs mentioning is that of student evaluation. Here there are concerns about the possible impact of the assessment methods we are using. Objective tests often imply transcultural methods, yet their application may produce results which are inconsistent with and different from societal objectives. At the USP, many lecturers religiously use the normal curve for grading purposes, yet Escotet (1976) has warned that the widespread use of the normal curve in educational assessment might lead to an increase in the number of competitive individuals, something that many Pacific islanders (who are not economists) continue to regard with distaste. Some recent attempts to deviate from the normal curve have been viewed with suspicion, despite the need to question the usual assumption that competitiveness is always desirable.

Challenges for the Future

In raising these issues, I acknowledge, with humility, the difficulty of teaching and learning in a culturally diverse area such as the Pacific Islands. I also know that many writers, in analysing the core issues and dilemmas that exist in culturally diverse societies, have emphasised the problematic nature of all judgements, including judgements in education, and the legitimising of various ideologies, while at the same time ensuring access to human rights, dignity and justice for all people. Some have also called for culture-fair and culture-free approaches while others have looked at the role and weaknesses of the assessment of formal learning outcomes, particularly of examinations, tests, and other judgemental decisions and evaluations, in the allocation of life chances, and the way in which they may be skewed and thereby fundamentally flawed (Gundara 1992). I acknowledge all of these concerns and agree that they continue to be important for us too, although I believe that no education program is culture-free but acknowledge that some methods are more culture-fair compared to others.

In raising the above issue and concerns, I also acknowledge that as professional educators, we cannot change the labour market nor eradicate discrimination. We can, however, enhance the employability of many of our students and develop their knowledge, entrepreneurial and occupational skills far more fully, as well as remove some impediments to their educational achievement. We can start by trying to move away from the view that any category of people can and should be defined as a problem. As educators, we can help to create a considerably more just and equitable distribution of the learning opportunities than now exists, and play a considerably more positive role than many teachers have so far been prepared to concede possible. There is an urgent need for a reappraisal of what is offered to our young people in schools and universities. More particularly, we need more appropriate diagnoses of their capabilities, motivations and situations. In this regard, Vasquez's (1992) discussion of the literature on cognitive styles and their relationship to academic achievement and needs of ethnic minorities is particularly instructive for PICs. He focuses on the particular cognitive mode of functioning known as field independence/

dependence and includes a brief survey of its conceptual development over time. Relations between this cognitive style and IQ grade level/age, social class and culture are explored, as is the value of matching teaching and learning styles. He concludes with a discussion of the relevance of cognitive styles today, especially among ethnically diverse student populations.

Finally, the usual structuralist perspective of western researchers using the categories of class, race and gender as lenses with which to see the issues of equity and access is often problematic for us because our vernacular/indigenous perspectives are context specific as reflected in our languages and cultural values. This aspect has to be firmly understood by those whose perspectives are based on Anglo-American cultures and languages. For us, the categories of class, race and gender are interconnected and do not operate independently of each other - this is reflected by the absence of equivalent vernacular concepts. Finally, in almost all PICs, there does not exist a large, dominant, white population against which the achievements of other 'races' can be compared. With few exceptions, such as in Fiji, most people who live in PICs are indigenous to those countries, so the issues of equity and access have to be considered within the cultural contexts of each country.

Having said this, I recognise the contribution of western analysis in offering us a way of understanding how formal education might affect societies, both positively and negatively, as I have described. We also know that although formal education offers opportunities for individual mobility (and I am an example of this), schools have also served directly and indirectly to encourage group inequalities, and improved access to formal education may not necessarily improve equity. Over the past ten years much work has been done in industrialised countries on the way inequalities in the broader society have been sustained through formal education, how schools prepare students for unequal futures and how students construct identities which themselves perpetuate these inequalities (Weis 1992). The heavy emphasis of most Pacific Island curricula on academic subjects and achievements, as well as the use of English, would suggest that

formal education is an important agency for the perpetuation of unequal conditions which ideologically suggest exactly the opposite role for schools, as sites for cultural transmission. There is, therefore, a need for more intensive dialogue to define and formulate alternative policies and practices for education in response to cultural diversity in our region. Views, although diverse themselves, have at least one thing in common, and that is the commitment to cultural democracy, human rights and the need to combat discrimination and prejudice.

Conclusion

In my view, therefore, improving formal education through enhanced concern for equity and access are within the grasp of many PICs but this can only happen through practices that value and recognise the cultural contexts of teaching and learning in the region. Teachers would be expected to provide more contextualised learning experiences and more democratic learning environments that will encourage students' acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes which are supportive of a critical appreciation of all cultures, including their own. Such an education should also counteract the danger that cultures can and do enslave, as well as liberate.

There is an urgent need for all those involved in improving equity and access in education in our region at least to understand the complex ways in which Pacific Island cultures influence the way people behave and learn, inside and outside educational institutions, if we are to broaden educational opportunities. I sincerely hope that my contribution today might help in facilitating such an understanding.

Finally, the need for alternative strategies in education, particularly of knowledge creation, has become a significant element in the recent debate about development education. However, the need for illuminating indigenous knowledge in that process has not been adequately addressed by educators both in our region and beyond, nor has it been subjected to transfer into the educational discourses of industrialised nations. This is despite efforts by the United Nations to affirm Indigenous Rights as reflected in the UN designated Year of Indigenous Peoples.

In most international discourses on education, such disenfranchisement is usually felt by most 'minority groups' including women, who often feel that the existing democratic framework and corporate economic structures do not sustain and, in some situations, even undermine the commitment to their special needs and wishes (Middleton 1992). I thus conclude with the humble hope that the current euphoria over democratisation and globalisation of education will not prevent the emergence of a new synthesis of indigenous and western educational ideas in our region, one which, I believe, can be an attainable educational goal for us in the 21st century.

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Note

¹ Keynote address, Learning Together – Collaboration in Open Learning Forum, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, April 20-22, 1998.