Why Non-Formal Education in Fiji?

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Introduction

This article examines the emergence of Non Formal Education (NFE) in Fiji, its current provision and the potential for school-based programmes. This requires an examination of the various learning systems and, in particular, the development of the formal education system, how it has acquired its high status and value in Fiji, and the inherent problems which have emerged. This article also provides a background discussion of the pre-colonial to post-independence education and the limitations of the formal schooling system.

Educational Development in Fiji

In this section the learning systems in Fiji are examined. They include traditional, formal and non-formal education. It is important to examine the three systems in relation to their roles, status and relationship to each other and the communities they serve.

Traditional Education

> The timing of the emergence of NFE has not only been associated with 'educational' concerns but with the concern that education has not been 'instrumental' in achieving the goals of the system (Khawaja and Brennan, 1990: 8).

This statement indicates a rationale for the emergence of NFE in contemporary Fiji. However, according to Bock and Papagiannis (1983: 166), broadly conceived, NFE is not a new concept but an educative phenomenon found integrally incorporated in even pre-literate societies. Increasing evidence exists to substantiate the claim that NFE is an old concept with a new name (Coombs 1985;

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Baba 1992). In pre-colonial Fiji, there was a form of education which we now call 'traditional education'.

The purpose of traditional education, in the context of this article, is to maintain social and cultural life in the community. What is learned is confined within a particular cultural tradition. In Fiji, traditional education was community-based and associated with the daily activities of the community. Parents and knowledgeable elders in the community shared their knowledge and skills for economic and social survival with children, to prepare them for adult life and their subsequent participation in community activities.

The skills learnt confined persons to their traditional roles. Boys learned skills in hunting, fishing, farming and other manual tasks. Girls were expected and encouraged to learn only those activities traditionally assigned to females. For example, the author learnt domestic and craft skills from her mother and female relatives when she was young. Children always followed their parents' occupations, and there was not much encouragement to learn the skills related to other occupations. This was traditionally unacceptable.

Learning was by observation, imitation or on-the-job-experience. When children reached puberty, they were exposed to organised learning. They were segregated from the community and experienced initiation rites and rituals with elders as their teachers. These activities were usually undertaken in a special building away from the village. This process enabled them to acquire the skills and knowledge for adulthood and their subsequent responsibility in the community.

Adults also continued to learn through participation and sharing in community activities and ceremonies. The teaching of traditional dance called the *meke* by specialised teachers called *daunivucu* was highly organised and ritualistic and a potent form of traditional education. Thus, in Fiji, some forms of organised learning were

practised well before the arrival of missionaries from the west (Baba, 1992).

It is important to note that in traditional education, the content, method and direction were very much controlled by tradition. What was learned, although limited and confined, was relevant to the people's way of life, the resources available and their ability to meet extended family and community needs. Learning was an important process as it ensured continuity and sustainability of life and because it was community-based.

In contemporary Fiji, while traditional education has continued to influence the cultural and social life in the community, its value has been undermined with the advent of schooling and the impact of overseas cultural ideas and practices.

Formal Schooling in Fiji

When the missionaries came to Fiji about 160 years ago they did not recognise or accept the traditional education system and introduced a new system of learning in Fiji: formal education.

Formal education, as defined in this article, refers to learning in specially built institutions with trained teachers and a written curriculum. With a mission to change and convert the indigenous people to Christianity, the church and school facilitated the process of this new education.

As the main aim of the schools then was to convert people to Christianity, the curriculum was largely focused on religion. However, some schools also taught science, history, geography and practical subjects, such as carpentry and cooking (Kedrayate 1999).

Literacy, both in Fijian and English, was seen as an important vehicle in bringing about conversion. Literature records that the high literacy rate achieved in Fiji by 1975 was the result of the efforts of the

missionaries and mission schools (Clammer 1976; Sharma 1990; Baba 1992).

It was the intention of the missionaries that those converted would promulgate the Christian faith among their own people as teachers, pastors and social workers. Hence, for Fijians[1], this was the beginning of taking up occupations outside their traditional roles. The school as an agent of change facilitated this process of acquiring the requisite skills and attitudes for these occupations and for a Christian way of living.

In the early days of Christianity, according to some oral evidence from the elders in my community, the missionaries also organised skills training for men in agriculture and house building, and discussions for women on home economics and elementary hygiene. The missionaries were not only concerned about conversion but also improving the living standard of the people. They made changes to the way of life and the system of learning in Fiji. These changes impacted on the everyday life, practices and values of Fijians. Although there was participation by the indigenous people, the content and direction of formal and other education was controlled by missionaries. This signalled the beginning of the community losing control of education.

Pre-Independence Schooling

The colonial government was initially reluctant to be involved in schooling. The 1969 Fiji Education Commission Report acknowledged this, stating that: "the history of education in Fiji is largely one of private initiative and effort" (Ministry of Education 1969: 6). However, the colonial government did provide funds for non-government schools and established a few schools for specific purposes.

The thirst for schooling amongst the communities in Fiji has outstripped the government's ability to satisfy it. Consequently, the various

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[1] Henceforth, the word Fijian refers to the indigenous people of Fiji.

Christian missions and, more recently, other religious and secular organisations, have stepped into the breach. The proliferation of private schools relieved the government of the obligation to provide state-owned schools. However, it caused it to evolve an elaborate system of government aid for these non-government schools. The management of all but a few primary and secondary schools remained in private hands. (Ministry of Education 1969).

Schools were seen by colonial administrators as institutions for producing a literate and numerate class of people to fill the middle managerial and professional positions in the colonial administration. The medium of instruction was English and the curriculum content was focussed on jobs. As a result, the language and curriculum were generally irrelevant to the daily lives of both the Fijians and the Indo-Fijians[2] (Sharma 1990: 8). Clearly, this marked a divergence between education for occupations in the modern sector and that which was suited to traditional social role needs. This system of education, and particularly the examination system which was based on models taken from Britain and later New Zealand, was used to screen a group of academically able students for higher education. However, the examination system also worked to the detriment of the majority who failed to reach these high standards and were labelled 'educational failures' or 'dropouts' (Sharma1990: 10).

Between 1960 and 1970, primary school rolls increased from 76,000 to 121,000, while the secondary enrolments rose from 5,400 to 16,000. The reasons for the increase were twofold: the increase in the primary roll was due to population increases. The secondary enrolments were boosted by rising social aspirations and employment opportunities of students in the modern employment sector (Whitehead 1986).

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[2] The term Indo-Fijian is used for the people of Fiji who are of Indian descent.

Post-Independence Education

When Fiji re-acquired its independence in 1970, the newly elected government acted against the recommendation of the 1969 Fiji Education Commission to curb the expansion of schools to maintain quality. More schools were established. It should be recognised that, as a democratically elected government, the government of Fiji was accountable to its electorate. Furthermore, as a newly independent state, Fiji needed a skilled labour force. Hence, the Minister of Education publicly stated that it was 'politically unacceptable to slow down the expansion of schools' (Whitehead 1986:14). So schools continued to be established all over the country.

Since independence, Fiji's three national development plans have related educational growth to work force needs. There has been a rapid growth of secondary education which has provided the recruitment pool for professional and semi-professional positions. Recruitment into such jobs is based largely on examination results. Consequently, schooling is predominantly academic and the curriculum is focussed on the requirements of external examinations. Preparations for examinations are the pre-occupations of both pupils and teachers (Kaye 1985; Baba 1986). Clearly, the 'diploma disease' and 'education inflation' persist and Fijian and Indo-Fijian parents continue to invest in academic education in the belief that it is conducive to upward social and economic mobility (Sharma 1990: 5). Most schools provide few alternatives for those who will not attain the few white-collar jobs available or entry to higher education.

A decade after independence, the Minister of Education claimed that the government had every reason to be proud of its educational achievements (Whitehead 1986). Although education was not compulsory, it was recorded that, in 1987, 99.5 percent of 6-11 year olds were attending school (National Economic Summit 1991: 07). Today, there is virtually universal access to primary and lower secondary school education, and there is a long-term commitment

to provide twelve years of education for all those who seek it.

Indeed, progress has been achieved, as measured quantitatively by high levels of school enrolment, improved equity of access, and the large number of academically qualified people. However, questions of the relevance and quality of curricula for the majority of children and their parents have continuously been raised, as problems have emerged within the schooling system (Whitehead 1986).

The Limitations of Schools

A number of interrelated issues of national concern for Fiji's socio-economic and political development have emerged.

The first issue is that of curriculum. Although some measures have been instituted in secondary schools to provide an alternative vocationally-oriented curriculum, the content remains largely academic. Students graduating from high school are educated for white-collar jobs and sometimes are reluctant to venture into other employment. As these white-collar jobs exist predominantly in urban centres, urban migration of youth has taken place, resulting in overcrowding, unemployment, crime and other associated problems (Baba 1986: 187).

The second issue is that of economic waste. Schools use a lot of resources in terms of personnel, material and finance. However, when the resources used are measured in terms of outcomes or productivity there is seen to be considerable wastage. Only a selected few of the products from the schooling system will proceed either to higher education or to employment in the limited sector of the civil service. The majority who are not skilled in any occupation will be unemployed or return to rural communities (Sharma 1990; Kaye 1982).

The third problem is that of unemployment, which is seen as arising partly from the inadequacy of the formal system to train students

for various skills that will enable them to find employment in industry and partly from the lack of employment opportunities for those completing school. This latter, compounded with high academic achievements by some, have made employers highly selective. Hence, for those who have failed examinations and are 'pushouts' from the system, there is little prospect for a career in the civil service. Even in the private sector there are few prospects for school-leavers as they lack the necessary skills.

In 1990 there were estimated to be approximately 19,000 children who dropped out of school at various levels (Sharma, 1990: 6). Half of these returned home to local employment or were unemployed. Unemployment among youths with primary, secondary and, recently, tertiary education is a national concern. These groups make up 69 percent of Fiji's unemployed (Ministry of Youth, Employment Opportunities and Sports Report, 1992).

It is evident from the discussion above that problems have emerged within and as a result of the formal education system. As the problems become evident, the role of the traditional learning system, which had declined in importance and was not a recognised part of the formal system, becomes more important.

Non-Formal Education in Fiji

This section describes the emergence of non-formal education as an international phenomenon and its permeation in developing countries such as Fiji. Its rationale, current provision and potential for school-based programmes are examined.

Rationale for Non-Formal Education

It was in the 1970s that disenchantment with formal schools became an international concern (Coombs 1985). Developing nations like Fiji faced grave problems due to their irrelevant imported educational models. It was at this stage that global discussions, debate and searching for alternatives to schooling were occurring.

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Critics of schooling, including the 'deschoolers' such as Illich (1971), argued against the monopoly held by formal education.

Amidst the criticism and search for alternatives, the 1972 UNESCO Report stressed the importance of viewing education broadly (as learning) and of strengthening less formal modes of education. Thus, non-formal education, an old concept bearing a new name, received vigorous support. The international interest in non-formal education was prompted by the move to have an integrated community-based approach to rural development and to meeting the basic needs of the poor. Coombs and Ahmed (1976) emphasise the potential for NFE in meeting the needs of the poor through the provision of necessary skills.

The upsurge of interest in NFE occurring internationally eventually permeated to Fiji in the late 1970s (Kedrayate 1999). There were two roles identified at that time for NFE in Fiji. It was perceived to respond both to the limitations of schooling and to the concerns about the workforce for economic development. The primary focus was the needs of school dropouts, who were spilling out from the formal education system with inadequate skills for employment. In addition, rapid technological and social change demanded training and re-training in knowledge and skills for those in modern employment as well as in the rural community. It was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that it was realised that the economy would not be able to absorb everyone into the workforce. It was perceived that non-formal education programmes and training were needed so that people could develop self-employable skills to generate their own livelihood (Kaye1982). There was recognition that, while educational resources had hitherto been concentrated on children, the demand for access to new skills and knowledge for those who were no longer at school had become more pronounced. NFE appeared to offer greater potential as it would bring out the self-reliance and resourcefulness of the islanders (Baba 1986: 189).

The two perceived roles of NFE have continued to be supported in programmes offered by government and non-government agencies.

Non-Formal Education Provision in Fiji

This section examines the current NFE provision offered in Fiji by different agencies and identifies some of the gaps and emerging needs.

Definition of NFE

In the context of this article, non-formal education in Fiji is defined as any organised educational activity which encourages and supports the participation and involvement of individuals and their community in identifying individual and community educational needs and then planning and implementing appropriate actions to solve them through community actions and co-operation. In this process, the mobilisation of local resources and the co-operation of all concerned are considered important.

Programmes and Providers of NFE in Fiji

In the colonial and early independence periods there was strong emphasis on the formal education systems and schools, but there also existed two streams of what could be termed NFE. These included traditional education and programmes offered by government and non-government organisations. Today, a number of non-formal education activities and programmes are offered by a diversity of agencies; including a wide range of government, non-government and regional agencies. These agencies have diverse aims and objectives, and target participants. Some communities set up their own programmes for out-of-school youths.

Various government departments offer a wide range of non-formal education activities. (These seek to assist people address their individual and community needs but the reality is that they follow

national policies.) The activities may involve creating awareness about certain social issues or teaching practical skills to youths, women and other members of the community in such areas as health, nutrition, improved farming methods, small business skills, craft skills, co-operative management and leadership.

Responsible government officials usually identify the target groups and, to a large extent, instigate the programmes. If individuals or community groups seek financial support for their programmes, the latter must comply with government policy. Unfortunately, some of these programmes are not well-planned in terms of catering for the long-term needs of the community and continuity. Money is obtained for immediate projects only and when these are completed, more funds are needed to continue the programme. Moreover, when programmes are initiated by representatives of agencies without the full involvement of the community in planning, the community does not claim ownership of the programmes. For example, in 1990 a government project was initiated in a rural community on Viti Levu. The author visited the community in September 1992. The project had declined. The community members perceived it as belonging to the ministry which had initiated it, and had not become fully involved.

Non-government organisations (NGOs) such as the church missions, the YMCA and YWCA, the National Council of Women, Fiji Council of Social Services and the Fiji Community Education Association also provide a wide range of non-formal educational activities such as projects for women, projects for out-of-school youth and community development.

The approach of NGOs to non-formal education is characterised by flexibility and expediency in relation to community needs. Such organisations are not as rigidly structured as government agencies. Unfortunately, their enthusiastic efforts are often hampered by lack of personnel and financial resources. To a

large extent, most rely on government or outside agencies for financial support.

Regional organisations, such as the Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education and the University of the South Pacific, as well as international agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organisation, facilitate as well as offer funds for non-formal education programmes. These agencies support various developments in Fiji, both in urban and rural communities. Some of the agencies have offices or representatives based in Suva.

These agencies have different approaches. While some work in collaboration with government departments, others work directly with the community. For example, the Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education in co-operation with its representative in Fiji and the Fiji Association of Non-Formal Educators works directly with community groups in facilitating workshops or assisting in other NFE activities identified by the community.

Generally, there is relative independence of each agency, and a lack of co-ordination in their operations because of the lack of a national policy on NFE. This has also created overlapping of programmes and duplication. Structures to co-ordinate at the community level as well as at the national level have received both support and scepticism from NFE educators. The autonomy of most agencies, particularly the NGOs, has allowed them free decision-making on choice of learning materials, external resources and target groups. However, recent efforts by government and non-government organisations to establish co-ordinating bodies are indicative of the importance and need for such structures.

NFE locations in Fiji

The diversity of NFE programmes in Fiji may be better understood when they are classified or categorised. This could be based on features such as the nature of provider or the location of the

programmes. Fiji's NFE programmes have been categorised by Kedrayate (1999.10.9) into four programme locations. They are institution-based NFE, centre-based NFE, village or community-based NFE and school-based NFE. This categorisation is used in this article, in order to isolate and emphasise the school as a base for NFE.

Institution-Based Non-Formal Education

'Institution' as used in this article refers to a building or buildings specifically built for educational purposes. Institution-based NFE is quite prevalent in Fiji and other Pacific nations, and is mainly offered by religious organisations, but with substantial government support. In this classification, the NFE programme is provided for full-time participants for a period between three months and three years. Some of the institutions are residential; those who conduct the programme reside in the institution while the participants are drawn from communities in the many islands of the country. The content of programmes is determined by the officials of the concerned institution, whether it is income-generation, agriculture, health, nutrition or rural development.

These programmes are targeted mainly at out-of-school-youth, with the aim of equipping them with skills they could use when they return to their villages. The three-year course at Montfort Boys' Town is an example. However, other providers, like the Marist Training Centre in Tutu, offer short programmes for adults, e.g. the three-month *Married Couples Course.*

Such programmes may have limited value, as they remove the participants from their communities for long periods and weaken their links with their rural environment (Kaye and Lewaravu 1988). In some cases participants have learning needs which are not catered for by the programme. In addition, the programmes tend to create an aspiration for waged employment, so that many are reluctant to return to their village, thereby defeating the aim of the programme (Kedrayate, 1999).

An important consideration in institution-based non-formal education is the support of parents and the community when participants return home. Organised courses for parents or guardians of participants to discuss family relationships and support for the implementation of learnt knowledge and skills would ensure continued support. Such programmes have been successfully implemented at the Marist Training Centre, Tutu, in Fiji and Saint Martin's in Solomon Islands. The support of community extension workers of other agencies in follow up visits and in collaboration with the institution is also vital in this category.

Centre-Based Non-Formal Education

The second category is centre-based non-formal education. According to Kedrayate (1999), centre-based programmes are offered for part-time or full-time participants in a centre which is designed and built for the purpose or in other specialised centres, such as agricultural stations, where staff from the centre are used as resources. Participants travel daily from their homes to attend these courses.

A characteristic of centre-based non-formal education is the integration of practical experience into the programme, whereby participants spend some time in the nearby communities implementing the skills they are learning. For example, at the Nacocolevu Agricultural station at Nadroga, whenever any agricultural skill training is undertaken, the participants have practical experiences at the nearby farms.

Two specifically built national rural adult training centres are located on the two main islands of Fiji. The Adult Training Centre of Navuso on Viti Levu and the Nasoso Adult Training Centre on Vanua Levu offer training facillities for government and non-government organisations which facilitate the courses. The centres are co-ordinated by the Methodist Church but subsidised by the government. These facilities are available to government, non-

government and regional agencies which seek to conduct their training in rural areas.

There are other centres which offer centre-based skills training programmes for youths, as well as training facilities for use by other agencies for short-term courses for adults. An example of this approach is the Centre for Appropriate Technology at Nadave on Viti Levu.

Centre-based NFE programmes, like institution-based programmes, have good facilities and equipment. The programmes are determined by facilitators of the organising agency. However, as pointed out by Kedrayate (1999), such programmes sometimes suffer from a lack of relevance in relation to the needs of the participants. Furthermore, financial and personnel problems of the executing agency, and irregular or no support and follow-up programmes for participants are also common in this approach. For example, a skill-training programme in the making of smokeless stoves for rural communities was undertaken at one of the centres. When participants returned to their communities they did not have any follow-up support from the centre staff to assist them in implementing their new knowledge and skills.

Community based NFE

The emphasis in recent years in Fiji has been to locate NFE programmes in the village or community. Some communities have community centres which are increasingly being used as non-formal education centres. In this approach, personnel from the various agencies travel to the village and community with their material and equipment to facilitate programmes. While this approach is convenient for the participants, as training and programmes are usually related to local needs and environment, the learning situation may be interrupted and attendance disrupted by family and community commitments. Visits by agencies are often irregular and unco-ordinated, resulting in duplication of effort and overlapping of programmes. Lack of personnel, financial resources and follow-

up are restraints to the executing agencies.

Secondary-School-Based NFE

In 1974, in response to the problem of school dropouts and unemployment, attempts were made in the formal system by the Ministry of Education to integrate both academic and vocationally oriented courses in a single-school. This move was undertaken in secondary schools with the purpose of re-directing education to vocationally oriented curriculum. These programmes, called 'multicraft programmes', were a form of NFE, as they were organised and targeted towards a particular group of students for the purpose of equipping them with self-employable skills. The rationale behind the multicraft programmes was the provision of training for early school leavers so that they could generate self-employment opportunities in their home areas (Sharma 1995: 88). The programmes included courses in agriculture, building craft, light engineering and home crafts for girls. The selection of programmes depended on the location of the school, the resources available and the needs of the students. The provision of NFE in secondary school may not have solved the problem of unemployment, but they offered some alternative programmes to parents and pupils. However, as substantiated by Sharma (1986), NFE in secondary schools was considered inferior or second class to the prestigious formal education. NFE programmes were mainly vocational courses and perceived by parents and students as relevant only to those branded as 'failures'. Undertaking NFE programmes did not lead to employment opportunities in the civil service.

Primary-School-Based NFE

The problems of unemployment and the need to educate the parents and the village community members to understand the changes occurring in society has prompted some primary school headteachers to use the primary school for non-formal education for youths, adults and, in some schools, for children in school.

For example, Naitasiri Bhartiya Primary School offers NFE programmes for community members for about two hours once a week. Subjects covered in the programmes include health, nutrition, effective parenting and home management. Specific skills taught for the women are sewing, cooking, craft and communication. Men learn some skills in carpentry and agriculture.

It is hoped that students and community members who attend the courses will come to understand the value of non-formal as well as formal education (Ministry of Education 1985: 25).

However, as substantiated in the Ministry of Education's annual report (1985), in some primary schools, NFE programmes started dramatically, but subsequently declined. The headteachers initiated programmes out of their own interest. The programmes were ad hoc and short-term. Although the headteachers were interested and keen, they lacked training and adequate understanding of the NFE concept and the long-term organisation of NFE programmes.

The few reports available on primary-school-based NFE programmes are very brief and do not discuss in detail why and how the programmes were started. To date primary school-based NFE has not been adequately conceptualised nor empirically validated.

Location is an important consideration in NFE. In Fiji the primary school is located near or in a village. If it serves several villages, it is usually situated in a central location. A primary school is also smaller in its establishment and its facilities are not as sophisticated as those of many secondary schools. This tends to provide a less threatening learning environment for community members who are often intimidated by big buildings and modern technology. In the Fijian context, a primary school is considered to 'belong to the community' as it is managed by a local committee elected by the community members.

In this respect, the primary school as an institution for learning has a social obligation to provide learning opportunities which are relevant not only for children but adults as well. Furthermore, it has the responsibility and capacity to make changes to accommodate the diverse and changing learning needs of both children and adults in the community.
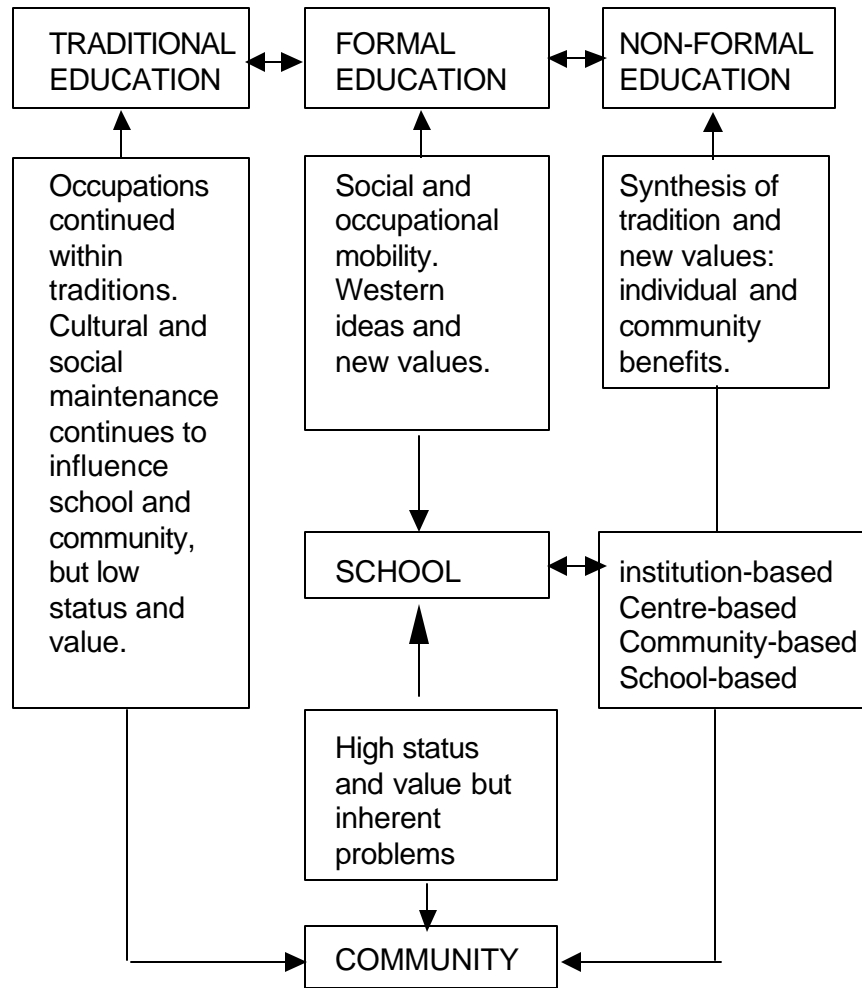
Summary

This article has examined the emergence of NFE in Fiji in the context of the various learning systems, traditional, formal and non-formal, illustrating the links among them and their roles and emphases.

Traditional education, which was undertaken in pre-colonial Fiji for the purpose of preserving social and cultural life, was a form of NFE. But it declined in importance with the institutionalisation of formal education by the missionaries. While it continues to influence the life of the community, it is not a recognised part of the formal system.

Formal education, with its emphasis on children and its focus on western ideas and new values, gained a high status in the community. While it may offer social and occupational mobility, inherent problems within the system became evident during the post-independence period.

The emergence of NFE in Fiji was in response to the problems created within the formal system and the concerns primarily for the school dropouts and also for the training and re-training in different skills – not only for those in the workforce but also for those in rural communities. Various NFE programmes have been established, some were short-term and others long-standing. They are here classified according to the location of their programmes. The categorisation is used to isolate the school as a base for NFE.

Fig. 1: Learning Systems in Fiji. The arrows indicate the connections among the learning systems and their roles and emphases.

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION	↔	FORMAL EDUCATION	↔	NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Occupations continued within traditions. Cultural and social maintenance continues to influence school and community, but low status and value.

Social and occupational mobility. Western ideas and new values.

Synthesis of tradition and new values: individual and community benefits.

SCHOOL ↔ institution-based Centre-based Community-based School-based

High status and value but inherent problems

COMMUNITY

NFE has been evident in Fiji but generally it is not well understood as a concept and not well co-ordinated. If it is to be understood, it requires a structure which is flexible and responsive to the social and cultural needs of individuals and communities. It seems to have potential in terms of individual, community and national needs

but it needs to be sensitive to the existing cultural groups' values and way of life. NFE has multi-purposes and it has the potential to change or conserve socio-economic and cultural values.

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