

Transforming the *fale*:

from the 'known' to the 'new' of pre-service teacher education in the Pacific

Compiled by Cresantia F Koya

Laying the foundation

The purpose of our group discussion was to begin a conversation to consider the reconceptualization of Pre-Service Teacher Education in the Pacific. We took a dialogic, narrative approach in which each group member shared her own educational experience as a student teacher, as a Pacific teacher and finally, as a curriculum player in her respective educational field and home country.

Emergent issues, themes and challenges were identified and developed in the discussion that ensued. We used a critical inquiry approach and our group engaged in asking questions in order to elicit a more meaningful discussion. Recurring questions included:

- What is the purpose of pre-service teacher education?
- How is 'pre-service' different from 'in-service' teacher education?
- What distinguishes Pacific teacher education from other teacher education programmes offered internationally?
- How can we develop a Pacific centered teacher education?
- How can pre-service teacher education best meet the needs of Pacific student teachers and the communities they serve?

The premise of our discourse is our underlying determination to facilitate dialogue that moves the reconceptualisation process towards a framework of pre-service teacher education that is firmly grounded in Pacific realities.

Contextualising the process

In order to begin the reconceptualisation process, we considered it was vital that the foundations of education be considered. This meant that the philosophy, the sociology and the psychology of Pacific pre-service teacher education had to be revisited. Only by giving these disciplines full consideration could a holistic picture of the pre-service student teacher, and his/her educational needs, emerge.

The metaphor: the *fale*

We have used the analogy of the Pacific house—variously called *fale*, *bure* or *are*— as a metaphor for teacher education in the Pacific. The Pacific house epitomises who we are and where we come from. At this point, we want you the reader to see ‘teacher education’ as a *fale* or Pacific house.

Transforming the *fale* implies a review of current paradigms. Our view of Pacific pre-service teacher education reform is based on this metaphor. The foundation of this transformation is embedded in the belief that self-determination is the cornerstone of the pillars (*poupou*) of the *fale*. It is therefore fitting that we construct the *fale* on a number of carefully selected pillars. The eight pillars on which this model is built, represent the eight posts (*poupou*) of the *fale*. These posts are firmly embedded in the (cultural and educational) foundations of the house (teacher education). To use our chosen Pacific vernacular, the *fale* is held in place by the firm foundation and supported by the pillars.

Questions we asked about the *fale* (teacher education) are these:

- Who built the *fale*? (educational history)
- Who owns the *fale*? (educational ownership)
- Who designed the *fale*? (educational planning)
- What is inside the *fale*? (curriculum content)
- Are the furnishings inside the *fale* useful or just for show? (relevance and practicality)
- What happens to the old furniture? (curriculum reform or curriculum change)
- Who changes the *fale*? (educational reformers, curriculum developers)
- Will the change improve the *fale*? (relevance of reform)

Construction process

We believe that the reform of pre-service teacher education must begin with the sharing and comparing of personal histories. This will ensure that any suggested framework incorporates the lived realities of teachers within and across the region. Our core concern is that the reform of pre-service teacher education be relevant and applicable to specific Pacific Islands contexts. This means keeping in mind that while there are shared commonalities across the region, such as smallness of scale, isolation and ‘scatteredness’, some island nations face more pressing issues than do others. These and other concerns must be duly considered so that successful situational analysis surveys can be conducted in every Pacific Islands nation.

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Contextualising the framework

The eight *poupou* (posts) represent the pillars of Pacific teacher education. Our group is of the shared view that the framework for Pacific teacher education will be used to develop pre-service teacher education programmes. We feel that only when a Pacific framework for teacher education is conceptualised will an effective review and reform of pre-service and in-service teacher education be possible. As such, the eight *poupou* of teacher education as determined by our group are: 1. Philosophy/Vision, 2. Policies, 3. Goal alignment, 4. Student needs and aspirations, 5. Teacher educators, 6. Quality learning and teaching, 7. Assessing learning, and, 8. Evaluation.

Poupou 1

Philosophy/Vision

The first *poupou* represents the philosophy of teacher education. We believe that the determination of a philosophy of pre-service teacher education will require first the articulation and dissemination of a vision for teacher education. The most pressing need is for a clear, shared vision of what we want for Pacific teacher education. This vision must be future-based and firmly grounded in the Pacific context and in its cultural realities. It is also imperative to ensure Pacific ownership and self-determination of this vision.

Poupou 2

Policies

The second *poupou* looks at educational policies and focuses on the administration and management of the teacher education programme. Important questions that need to be answered are these:

- How do the policies of the Pacific teacher education institutions devolve from international, regional and national educational goals?
- How can teacher education programmes be better focused through articulated policy?
- How do educational policies (regional, national and institutional) affect the teacher education programme?
- Is there a need for policy change? How can this eventuate?

Understanding policy issues is particularly significant for teacher education, as the articulated needs and specifications within mandated policy affect teacher qualifications and employability upon completion of the particular teacher education programme.

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Poupou 3

Alignment of goals

The third *poupou* focuses on goal alignment. This simply means that ad hoc goal setting should not be the accepted trend in teacher education. Short-term and long-term goals must be aligned so that the development process and its review are holistic and systematic. These goals mirror the vision of teacher education. Once the dichotomy of in-service and pre-service teacher education has been established, the specific goals of the two programmes can then be determined.

Poupou 4

Responding to students' needs and aspirations

The fourth *poupou* relates directly to the student teacher. Questions that need to be answered here include:

- What are the student teachers' experiences, needs and aspirations?
- How do teacher education programmes respond to these needs and aspirations?
- How can teacher education best construct new knowledge on the lived experiences of the student teacher?
- What considerations need to be made about ICT, face-to-face and print mode course offerings at teacher training institutions?
- How are the needs of pre-service student teachers different from those of an in-service teacher?
- How do we then respond to the specific needs of the pre-service teacher?

Poupou 5

Teacher educators

The view taken here is that all teacher educators, whether they be lecturers, instructors or tutors, must be well versed in a variety of teaching strategies. They are also expected to be aware of and to employ teaching methods inclusive of a variety of preferred student learning styles.

The significance of mentoring and peer support is also recognised as a preferred study method of many students; this is something that could well be utilised in teacher education programmes. Learning patterns must be mapped carefully to ensure that social interaction occurs not only between the teacher educator and the student teacher, but also among student teachers

themselves. Assessed cooperative group learning is also encouraged, to develop social group learning. This is an important skill at both school and community levels.

Poupou 6

Quality learning and teaching

Poupou six corresponds to the teaching and learning that takes place during the teacher education programme. We identified some of the key characteristics of quality teachers, whom we categorised variously as risk-takers, good communicators and critical thinkers. We suggest, too, that they are, ideally, creative, reflective, visionary, proactive and exemplary models of professional ethics. This list, though daunting, is by no means exhaustive.

Thus, trainee teachers are expected to demonstrate these and other qualities. They are expected to be creative and inspirational, to possess certain basic skills and values, to be able to apply and synthesise theory, and to have the capacity to learn by doing. Most importantly, trainee teachers must be critical thinkers and reflective practitioners.

Teacher education courses are expected to reflect the reality of the educational context and respond to the needs of teachers. As well, they need to show a thorough understanding of the national curricula of Pacific Islands countries. These courses must incorporate specific case studies, which enable a clearer bridge between theoretical frameworks being learned and the reality that Pacific schools present. The variety of ways in which content is put together should be inclusive of oral histories and traditional ways of learning. The underpinning agenda here is the belief that a culturally democratic learning environment will ensure a systematic evolution of knowledge frameworks. This it is expected will be developed upon by the various educational institutions based on their visions of a Pacific driven curriculum. It is encouraged that the constructivist approach is used to better facilitate meaningful learning in teacher education programmes.

Poupou 7

Assessing learning

This *poupou* focuses on the role of assessment in the teacher education programme. We list some important questions that need to be raised.

- How do we know that learning is taking place?

- How do we know that the basic competencies expected of a student teacher have been acquired?
- How do we measure this?
- Are examinations that assess theoretical knowledge an adequate measure of teaching competencies?
- How do we, the teacher educators, know that we are making a difference?
- What should the teaching practicum look like?

We suggest that an assessment component is essential in the planning of quality teacher education. Teacher education programmes must utilise a variety of assessment tools including testing, examinations, portfolios, oral assessment, individual and group assessment as well as self-assessment, to name a few. Our group felt that the use of portfolios as a measurement tool is currently underutilised. We see that it can be developed as a very useful and effective means of assessing student learning and development over a period of time.

Poupou 8

Evaluation

The final *poupou* is concerned with the evaluation of the teacher education programme. Evaluation, here, involves a judgment of the reliability and validity of the overall programme. We need to ask:

- Are the courses we are offering meeting the set objectives that they purport to achieve?
- Do the teaching methods employed elicit meaningful learning?
- Are the assessment tools utilised a true measure of the skills and knowledge predetermined by the programme vision?
- Are the aims and objectives of the programme being met?
- Are the aims and objectives of the programme realistic?

These and other questions need to be asked regarding the overall effectiveness of the programme. The questions must be asked again and again of the players involved, to ensure a continuous cycle of growth for the programme. Only by constantly addressing these questions can the learning community be fully nurtured. Comparative studies between similar scale teacher education institutions will also help us to understand shared challenges and issues and tried approaches to these.

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New designs for new challenges

We agree that the reform of Pacific pre-service teacher education must hinge on local reform that is contextualised. This reform must bring together international practices and standards with national and regional aspirations and expertise. The reform process needs the maintenance of a cultural focus and must recognise that Pacific society, like the rest of the world, is in transition. The knowledge and skills required by members of this changing society must be ascertained to establish a firm grounding of the conceptualisation process within the Pacific reality.

We believe that there is an urgent need for action-based research from both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives. Undertaking these studies collaboratively will ensure a comparative and holistic overview of the educational needs of the Pacific. It would also address the issue of over-generalisation and take into account specific needs and contexts of particular Pacific Islands states, such as the smallness of Kiribati or Tokelau.

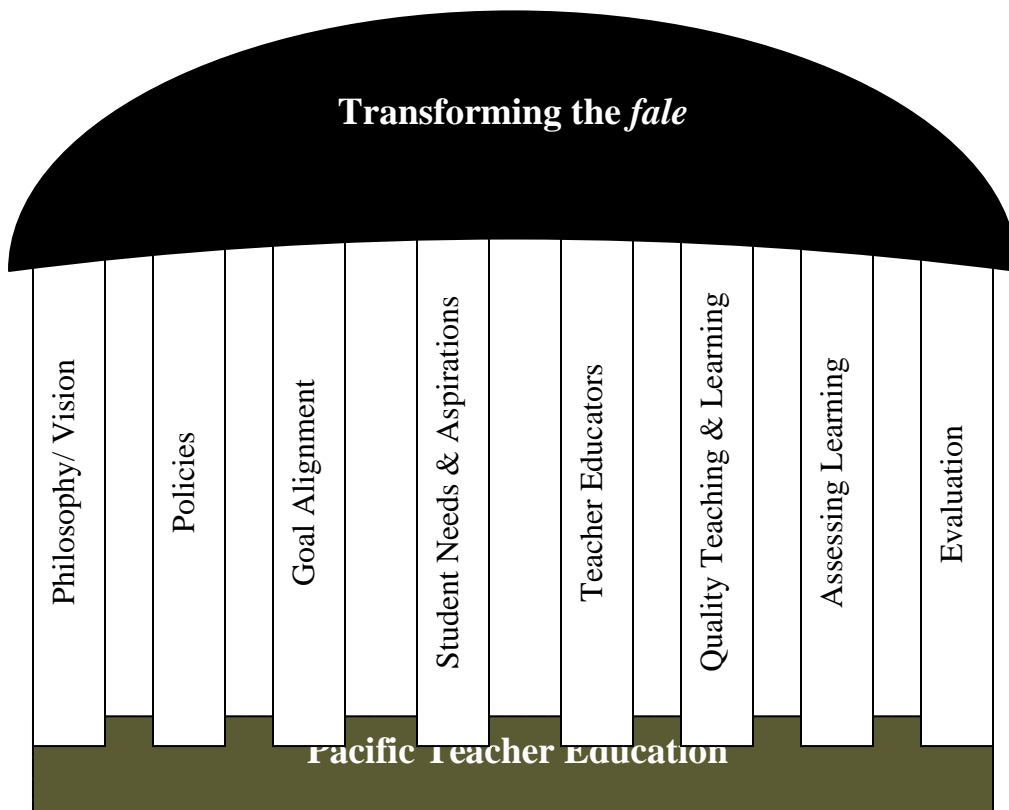


Figure 1: Model for the reform of Pacific Teacher Education

We suggest that the frameworks for pre-service teacher education that emerge should be future based and firmly rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems. The philosophy behind every pre-
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service teacher education programme must be closely linked to that of teacher education in general and to in-service teacher education. Such a close connection will ensure fluidity and quality assurance in terms of teacher standards in Pacific schools. We further argue that a systematic approach to the setting of long- and short-term goals is necessary. This, we believe, offers the promise of continuity, effective management and optimal use of all available resources.

We see a challenge requiring serious consideration if the reconceptualisation of the pre-service teacher education programme is to meet the demands of educational stakeholders and curriculum players. This raises the issue of situational analysis and the need to listen well to stakeholder input at the reconceptualisation stage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the group agreed that pre-service teacher education in the Pacific needs to be responsive to the demands of teachers in the region. It must take note of what is best for teachers now in new times. We see an urgent need for a paradigm shift from the current prescriptive, ‘full’, examination-driven curriculum to a holistic development of the pre-service student teacher. This requires a reform not only of the content of the pre-service programme, but also of the processes of implementation and the evaluation methods employed. Only by means of a thorough review of the foundations of teacher education can pre-service teacher education undergo a successful and meaningful reform. This process of rethinking teacher education is imperative before any real, positive moves can be made towards the reform of a pre-service and in-service teacher education framework.

We are convinced that this reform must be firmly placed in the context of the Pacific. This is the *fale*. It is who we are. It is where we are.

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