

PACIFIC HISTORY ON THE RIM what should students learn?

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ABSTRACT: The present status of Pacific History in Australian schools is analysed and compared against earlier decades and against developments in the History curriculum of Pacific Island schools. After outlining obstacles facing teachers keen to introduce studies of the Pacific in their History classrooms, it is suggested that the commitment and professionalism of teachers will bring greater penetration across national and state curricula than top-down prescription. Discussion on variation in course design, appropriate content and awareness among teachers of recent historiography debates, leads to reference to the many attempts made to promote, with limited success, Pacific-related content in History curricula.

In Australian schools the word ‘coup’ is now inextricably associated with the word ‘Fiji’. Media coverage of conflict in Bougainville, rainforest logging, and journalists being jailed in Tonga reinforces the use of phrases such as ‘troubled paradise’ and ‘regional unrest’. In Australian schools the exotic/disaster approach is narrowed further by concentration on media-driven events and topicality.

What should schools on the rim teach about the Pacific? When the ideas in this essay were first presented at a conference in Tasmania in 1990, it was with enthusiasm for subject matter that seemed in the previous decade to be attracting teachers’ attention and was making small but significant inroads in the curriculum of eastern Australian states and territories.¹ Now, revisiting the situation in schools a mere six years later, it appears that Pacific History

and Pacific Studies generally have failed to assert a place in the curriculum and have been swamped by vocationally-oriented, economic-rationalist, nationally designated priority subjects. This essay joins the struggle against this trend by identifying several positive moves in the local, state and national arena. The intention is not to mislead readers into believing that Pacific Studies is being widely taught or expanding. I write thus because I now believe that good teaching locally, which spreads among colleagues through its own dynamism, is having a greater impact than top-down or centrally-prescribed policies which dictate that schools in Australia should teach Pacific History or Pacific-related subject matter.

Several obstacles lie in the path of teachers keen to teach about histories in the Pacific. Australian school teachers easily create topic lists on what to teach and these inventories of concepts, issues, incidents and famous/infamous characters offer ample opportunity to tackle critical, interpretative and useful learning experiences. But the lists constructed by Australians are event-driven and media-driven constructions of the Pacific, highlighting coups, cyclones, corrupt politicians and resource exploitation by multinational corporations. As well as being biased towards disasters and problems, the topic lists drawn up by school teachers on the rim reflect *papalagi* or European and outsider predilections. Should these lists be translated into courses and syllabi, students would miss matters of broader historical reflection and inquiry and miss contact with the opinions, cultural contexts and personal concerns of the Pacific Island people being studied. A major task therefore is to divert students at school in rim nations such as Australia, away from the Eurocentric, constructed Pacific in which Islanders puppet-like move only to the strings of colonial and postcolonial demands and pressures. However, demanding that studies offered on the rim should be island-centred assumes that teachers on the rim are trained and willing to teach a course that gives centrality to the meanings, world view and experiences of the people of the Pacific being studied.

History and Social Studies teachers in Australia are under great pressure to develop Asia-literate students and to absorb Aboriginal, gender, political, ethnic and environmental perspectives. In this crowded curriculum a further danger is that teachers might tackle the Pacific as a descriptive study of well-publicised media events and incidents in the lives of 'great men', demonstrating the world-system inevitability of a certain course of action. This approach would fail to generate a questioning of the meanings, cultural contexts and

historical consciousness that Pacific Island peoples might attach to incidents in their lives.

A difficulty facing teachers keen to teach about the Pacific was raised by Greg Dening when he challenged the use of the tag 'Pacific History'. He suggested that the phrase 'history *in* the Pacific' was more appropriate, noting that among historians of or in the Pacific, there should be more tolerance of the variety of histories being written, that history should be liberating and that for several reasons it should be written more in the vernacular (Dening 1989). But few of the teachers keen to tackle history in the Pacific have taken Pacific-related subjects in their undergraduate or graduate programmes and few are familiar with the historiography of the discipline which, despite its own short history, now stretches to thirty or more critical and reflective essays. Another unresolved debate touched on by Dening concerns the purpose of Pacific History. He suggested that there is a debate between those who want 'to raise historical consciousness by expressions of cultural expression and those who sought to raise historical consciousness by knowledge of the world systems that control Pacific lives' (Dening 1989:135). The anthropologist Roger Keesing suggested there was a distinction between the mythical, ancestral past being recreated and invoked in the contemporary period, and the authentic or real past, which is a representation closer to what people did in actual times and places. Keesing suggested that 'the ancestral ways of life being evoked rhetorically may bear little relation to those documented historically, recorded ethnographically and reconstructed archeologically' (Keesing 1989:19). Few school teachers are skilled or confident in ways of implementing this distinction in their classroom practice.

Another problem for teachers was raised in Deryck Scarr's general history of the Pacific, *Kingdoms of the Reefs*. Scarr pointed out the difficulty of marrying the oral testimony of Pacific Island peoples with the written records of outsiders. He referred to the genealogies of Mailu Islanders, which record first contact with Europeans at about 1800, while the Spaniard Diego de Prado recorded in his journal that it occurred on 24 August 1606, a difference of some 200 years (Scarr 1990:79). Teachers on the rim working predominantly with the European written record will be able to present a connected narrative, but probably will not be able to engage students in the complexities of contested histories in the Pacific.

The seal of approval, or the praise of 'counter-interpretation', has been awarded to books such as Judith Bennett's *Wealth of the Solomons* (1987), Greg Denning's *History's Anthropology: the death of William Gooch* (1989) and his *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (1992), Claudia Knapman's *White Women in Fiji* (1986), and Klaus Neumann's *Not the Way it Really Was* (1992). With few resources and without immersion in these debates in their own training and subsequent professional development programmes, it is asking too much of school teachers that they present history as interpretative and counter-interpretative and as only an artefact of the time in which it was written. In practice, with limited training and resources, teachers introducing Pacific-related content will start enthusiastically by teaching in didactic fashion from the front of the classroom. The content will probably be descriptive, narrative accounts of recent events in Papua New Guinea or Fiji, a choice related to the greater availability in Australia of texts, video material and media reporting on those two countries.

A common flaw in school courses and units has been to identify the Pacific as a region by placing Tahiti, Tuvalu, Tonga, Tokelau and other nations and dependencies into one basket, collectively identified as the South Pacific. The most recent phrase, the Pacific Century, is as notable for its vagueness as for its failure to include the Islands and people of the Pacific within its territory or expression. Teachers and students repeat these common political and media practices.

The statements almost twenty years ago in the Harries Report on Australia and the Third World reflected the arrogant elder-brother view of what 'outsiders' thought of the Pacific. The Harries Report pointed out that 'one motivation for Australia's active support for the South Pacific Forum and other forms of sub-regional collaboration is to encourage a sense of collective identity among these small countries' (Harries 1979:117). Teachers cannot be expected to challenge this view if they not aware of antipathy that rejects both the metropolitan motivations for regionalism and the western and superpower tendency to perceive of the Pacific as a single, mostly empty, geographical zone. The political, economic and educational imperative in Australian government and education is for Australian students to be Asia-literate. This makes the Pacific seem peripheral and relegates the Islands, and therefore the study of them, to the fringe of a Pacific basin dominated by Asia.

A new field of study will always attract interest from teachers keen to replace well worn and tired topics from past decades. However, Pacific content is no longer new. Two Pacific related projects at the Canberra-based Curriculum Development Centre in the late 1970s, the 'Pacific Circle' project and a short lived Pacific Islands Curriculum Project, had little influence on State authorities or among the devolving, school-based curriculum development networks concerned with compulsory schooling. The Pacific History Association has promoted school activities and published guides for teachers. The adoption of the Pacific as a focus, during the International Year of Peace, was a stimulus and Film Australia produced an excellent school video kit based on the 'Human Face of the Pacific' documentary series. While these did raise the consciousness of some teachers they had a limited impact. Stimulus was also provided by special 'Pacific' issues of various journals, which added to an increasing public and academic awareness of the region.²

Numerous Centres and research concentrations on the Pacific have opened, closed or drifted, mostly based in universities and mostly without an impact on the curriculum in schools. At the same time the number of courses offered and the number of undergraduate and postgraduate students taking Pacific related studies and interdisciplinary courses in Australian universities expanded, consolidated and then fell. Although the study of history in the Pacific is represented by a complex infrastructure of research and teaching institutions and by an extensive range of book and journal publication (Howe 1986:6), little has been done to prepare teachers for classrooms in which students can learn about the Pacific on a regional, subregional or individual nation basis. Teacher Education programs have been sorely lacking in any sort of Pacific perspective. In the Arts, Humanities and Social Science faculties of universities the expansion of the 1980s has turned in the 1990s to a gradual attrition of subjects and designated Pacific History staff appointments. A once secure list of Pacific related units in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (Quanchi 1989:12) is now under threat from a wide range of interdisciplinary, thematic and concept driven courses. If there had been a cohort of graduates with a Pacific background entering the teaching profession it might have caused a wave of enthusiasm for the study of the Pacific. That opportunity is now lost as Arts and Education courses face further university cutbacks and the competition of vocational, technological, information and human services subjects intensifies.

During the last decade, the individual nations of the Pacific and the region have become a newsworthy item and there are few trainee teachers, teachers and students in Australia who have not read or seen media reports on the BRA, Rabuka, logging, *raskol* attacks, French testing, driftnet fishing and sumo, gridiron and rugby stars from the Islands. Regular stories with Pacific themes appear in popular magazines as diverse as *Women's Weekly*, *Australia Geographic*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Surfing World*, *Dolly*, *Vogue* and the *Australian Stamp Buying Guide*. The noncommercial television channels, ABCTV and SBSTV, regularly screen documentaries and special news features on the Pacific. But what do teachers and students make of this amalgam of myth, insight and fact? The arrival of the Pacific as a newsworthy item demands that teachers are prepared to handle Pacific-related content critically, in an historical framework and with cultural sensitivity as it arrives fortuitously or by design in their classrooms.

At the primary level, Social Studies teachers 'do' Fiji, Papua New Guinea, canoes, firewalking and grass huts in a disjointed and exotic manner. Geography and Social Studies teachers at the secondary level tackle cost-benefit studies of development, tourism, appropriate technologies and aid, and briefly in the 1980s, peace and nuclear free Pacific issues were part of many middle-secondary courses. In Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland attempts have been made through centrally-prescribed curriculum statements to introduce Pacific content into schools, but with only isolated local success.

There has been occasional support for the principle that schools in Australia should undertake Pacific-related studies. This idea first attracted support during the early 1980s. In opening the Auckland 'Teaching Pacific History' regional conference in 1986, the New Zealand Director-General of Education said that 'the introduction of more Pacific history into schools was one way of helping locate New Zealanders more firmly in the geographic and cultural context of their region' (Howe 1986:5). The same might be said for Australian schools. The Commonwealth Schools Commission in their report, *In the National Interest*, noted that 'schools should systematically teach about Australia, presenting it as . . . a country which is a part of the Asian-Pacific region with important links to and interests in the region' (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1987:19). In 1987 the Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education (CRASTE) noted in their report on Australian Studies, *Windows onto Worlds*, that academics had

urged the committee to approach Australian History from a perspective that would enable students to view their culture and society in a world context. The report noted that a programme designed to provide a social context for the learning of skills 'needs, in conceptualising Australia to begin from the role and place of the Aboriginal and Islander people' (CRASTE 1987:103, 68). (The report was referring here to Torres Strait Islanders.) A Parliamentary inquiry in 1988–89 into Australia's relations with the South Pacific reported that schools needed to place greater emphasis on the Pacific region to encourage and develop in the youth of Australia an interest in, and appreciation of the Pacific and its people. The report recommended that government initiatives be directed to developing curricula related to Australia and the South Pacific within existing school programmes (SSCFATD 1989). The tabling of the report failed to produce any change or improvement in policy or practice.

As far back as the late 1960s, two documentary texts, John Young's *Australia's Pacific Frontier* (1967) and Roger Hainsworth's *Builders and Adventurers* (1968) were published for teachers interested in teaching about links between Australia and the Pacific. In 1983 the Pacific History Association published an annotated bibliography on Australia's relations with the Pacific (Quanchi 1983), and in 1988 jointly published with the Victorian Ministry of Education a guide for teachers on the study of the contemporary Pacific (VCAB 1988). The New South Wales Geography Teachers' Association and the Sydney-based Inner-City Education Centre have also published guides and workbooks on Australia–Pacific topics (e.g. Stokes 1985). Although in Australia, as in New Zealand, there is a strong argument that a national history is incomplete without some understanding of links with the Pacific Australia–Pacific material has reached only a few classrooms.

Arguments for the inclusion of the Pacific and particularly Australian–Pacific links must traverse ground already claimed by Asian studies, Aboriginal studies, gender studies, peace studies, global studies and other contenders for timetable space. The Pacific ranks well behind foreign language studies, technology–computer studies and others as an area of national significance. With a higher ranking, the Australian Research Committee, which distributes funds to academics, universities and institutions, might include a funding category on the Pacific as it has done in the past for Asian Studies (Asian Studies Council 1988), and the federal government,

which funded an Asian Studies Council and more recently a South Asian Studies Council, might then fund a Pacific Studies Council. These developments would in turn stimulate teaching about the Pacific in schools. However, there is a danger in relying only on top-down promotion. If the Asian Studies promotional campaign, which began in the 1970s, is a guide, studies of the Pacific might end up being defined by relevance to pragmatically viewed economic and strategic relationships, and school library shelves would end up with expensive but rarely used multi-media kits.

The obstacles just listed seem overwhelming, but there is a counterweight in the form of many dedicated, professional and inspiring classroom teachers of history. As schools in Australia have considerable freedom to introduce school-based curriculum, within broad boundaries set by national and state curriculum statements, teachers keen to introduce Pacific-related material simply need to decide what topics to teach and how to incorporate them in existing or annually-reviewed student study programs. The following examples of topic lists indicate that when free from centralised prescription, the topic choices made by teachers are underpinned by pedagogical, ideological and topical considerations. The lists also indicate that teachers are aware of the contemporary events of the region and their broader historical context. The first two lists were gathered at History teacher workshops the author conducted in Melbourne in 1987 and 1988. They indicate a teacher preference for topical events and issues relevant to their own world view. The question posed was: What should be included in a course on the Pacific?

Example A **Pacific History Topic List, Victoria, 1987**

Art	Land rights
Australia and the Pacific	Micronesia/Polynesia/Melanesia divisions
Change and continuity	Missions
Concept of the noble savage	Nuclear issues
Contact with the West	Oral traditions
Contemporary events	Origins of the people
Economy	Pollution
Environment	Religion
Exploration-voyages	Social conditions
First contacts	Superpower involvement
Food	Traders
Geography of the rim	Tourism
Habitat and resources	Type of government
Imperialism	Who should be there?
Independence	World War II and Japan

There are omissions and inclusions that some might wish to debate, but a cohesive study design or course of work constructed from this jumble of concepts, events and themes would probably encompass much of the content deemed important by historians. The second list, gathered seven months later from a similar cohort of Victorian history teachers, was in response to the same question: What should be included in a course on the Pacific?

Example B Pacific History Topic List, Victoria, 1988

Boundaries and territories	Kanak and Tahiti riots
Colonisation - Australia in PNG Compared with USA in Philippines	Kanaky case study
Culture case studies	Mining in PNG
Current events	Nuclear waste
Daily life of a family	Palau Compact
Economic development	Population changes
Fiji coup	Religion
French testing	Religion and colonisation links
Geography of the region	Role of women
Independence movements	Technological development
Indonesia-PNG-Australia relationship	Tourism
Influence of aid	Traditional values and lifestyles
Influence of superpowers	Traditional v western values
Island economies	USA Bases

The second list demonstrates sentiments embodied in recent social education statements and reflects the thinking of teachers sensitive to directions offered in peace education, human rights education and global education platforms of the 1980s. Despite the unreliability of this type of straw vote, the lists indicate that teachers are cognisant of a wide range of contemporary and significant developments in the Pacific. However, few of these respondents had the opportunity to actually teach topics on the Pacific or to use the Pacific as a content vehicle to develop the skills, concepts and methodologies that underpin the historical inquiry being promoted in recent history curriculum statements. A similar lack of opportunity existed in New Zealand schools. For example, in the 1980s a unit written by Samoans teaching in New Zealand had been produced on Western Samoan history, for Samoan students in New Zealand schools, and for general use.³ Even though attempts like this were made to stimulate teaching about the Pacific and

particularly the heritage and culture of Pacific Islanders resident in New Zealand, far more action, and on a wider front, was needed for an impact to be felt across state and national education systems.

For a course design prepared on the rim to avoid Eurocentrism in the choice of topics and themes is difficult, given that the writing of histories in and about the Pacific is still predominantly in the idiom and conceptual framework of the non-Pacific Islander researcher and observer. Albert Wendt, a Western Samoan, author and university teacher, when quoted in a New Zealand newspaper under the banner headline, 'European history of Pacific attacked', described Pacific History as an 'embodiment of *papalagi* memories, perceptions and interpretations of the Pacific . . . [m]ost of us Pacific islanders end up knowing little about our homes and the little we read is the history in which we are the backdrop to the performances of *papalagi* protagonists' (*Evening Post*, 22 August 1985). In other disciplines there have been similar criticisms. For example, the contribution of anthropologists to the greater understanding by Papua New Guineans of their own identity and culture has been questioned. Criticism centred on anthropology as an invasion of privacy and on anthropology as a form of cultural imperialism (Gordon 1981). The result in Papua New Guinea was the introduction of research and fieldwork regulations applicable to all those undertaking fieldwork. Criticism of *papalagi* academic imperialism also appears in poetry, short stories and fiction, such as Epeli Hau'ofa's *Tales of the Tikongs* (1988). In order to reverse the tendency towards insular and Eurocentric approaches in much of the material students now study, an awareness of these criticisms should be one of the design parameters for school curricula.

An outline for a school-level Pacific history course, suggested in 1986 by New Zealand historians at a 'Teaching Pacific History' workshop, indicates that a dominant paradigm rooted in colonialism still looms over teachers trying to design a course of study for their students (Howe 1986). The outline suggested at the Auckland workshop is shown in Example C.

**Example C Outline for a School Level Course in Pacific History,
New Zealand, 1986**

1. The oceanic environment
2. Origins, migrations and settlement
3. Pre-European societies and cultures
4. The arrival of the European
5. The colonial experience
6. Moves towards independence since 1945
7. Post-colonial period

Ten years later teachers in Nauru suggested a similar outline for a new Year 10 History course, emphasising European achievements, great men and movements and overlooking accessible Pacific examples of the same themes and topics (TTPF 1996:38). In Fiji, History teachers at a professional development workshop rejected a suggestion that more Pacific content be included in the history curriculum. They feared students would become inward-looking and not develop a personal world view. More European History, and less Pacific History, was preferred because ‘it was only right that the students be taught European history in order to understand better European activities in the Pacific and European attitudes towards the indigenous peoples of the Pacific’ (Vitayaki 1996).

Teachers of history in Pacific classrooms give voice to these opinions partly because they studied European-dominated content in their own schooling and university studies and the history books they still use rarely give agency or voice to island peoples. Some Australian and Pacific Island teachers, with access to a greater history archive and library and aware of revisionist, counter-hegemonic and poststructuralist approaches, would challenge this form of Western domination of history content in Pacific Island schools by constructing course outlines based on different time frames, on thematic rather than chronological sequences and critical, issues-based and reflective studies rather than knowledge-recall about events in Euro-American history. In her opening address at a History teachers’ workshop in Fiji, Teresia Teaiwa reminded delegates that although Fijians were ‘products of a colonial or colonially-influenced education, some of us have not forgotten our own indigenous ways of seeing the past and the opportunity is still open to the rest of us to decolonise our Histories’ (Teaiwa 1997). Her plea would resonate with many Australian teachers of history

grappling with nationalism, revisionism and Prime Ministerial calls for sanitised history courses in schools.⁴

It is interesting to compare the topic lists compiled by history teachers from Australia with those of History teachers from the Pacific. A brainstorming format to identify appropriate content has been part of the programme at 'Teaching Pacific History' workshops in the region, organised at first by the Pacific History Association and now by the Teaching the Pacific Forum (TTPF) project. At the second of these workshops, funded by UNESCO at Nuku'alofa in 1989, teachers opted for the following thematic 'issues' approach to course design.⁵ Their rejection of a narrative structure mirrors the preference of teachers at Australian workshops and challenges the conventional chronological approach. The Nuku'alofa workshop's preferred areas of study are shown in Example D.

Example D What should be studied in a Pacific History course? Nuku'alofa, 1989

Aid and trade	Migration and settlement
Colonialism and imperialism	Neocolonialism
Communications	Political systems
Conflict and cooperation	Regionalism and regional organisations
Economic development and exploitation	Religious systems
Environment issues	Self determination and anti-colonialism
Ethnicity	Social systems
Independence and inter-dependence	Women's roles

Source Wood 1989:16.

The participants suggested that each theme could be studied using alternating approaches including document analysis, oral and local fieldwork, regional and international comparison, or chronological and integrated approaches using interdisciplinary skills and methodologies. At a workshop session conducted by the author in Tarawa in 1994, History teachers had no trouble quickly filling a blackboard with similar topics that 'must be taught' and were easily able to synthesise the mass of material into a sequential, logical and thematically arranged course of study.

Variation in pedagogical and ideological motivation in course design is not an obstacle. Indeed this variation in preferred content opens the pathway for Pacific History to be nurtured in a number of equally viable classroom learning experiences, relying on either centrally-prescribed or school-based curriculum frameworks and using a number of teaching approaches. New

textbooks on the Pacific, long overdue and essential if Pacific content is to be introduced, should reflect the general direction illustrated in the topic lists cited above. Examples, including *Tukulaumea*, a series of six booklets by Helen Boutell and Ian Campbell (1994), *Australia's Pacific Neighbours* by Michael Brooks and Stephen Codrington (1989), *Australia, Asia and the Pacific* by Michael Briggs (1996), and a series of three books by Stephen Duggan, Stephanie Fahey, Martin Peake and Max Quanchi (Duggan and Fahey 1993; Peake 1989; Quanchi 1990b) contain much the same array of topics, contemporary issues and concept based approaches.

A SURVEY of curriculum developments and appropriate content suggests that while some proselytisers might call for the study of the Pacific to be compulsory in Australian schools, it is likely to remain a plea drowned out by 'more relevant' national priorities. To sidestep the obstacles of relevance and low priority it is necessary to promote contemporary, thematic and Island-centred approaches and to nurture these at the individual school level.

The choice of contemporary events as a focus for Pacific History units and courses (instead of, for example, early history, nineteenth century colonialism, general surveys, 'slice' or other approaches), is based on several considerations. First, there is more useable school-level material, though not necessarily produced for that market, on events in the post-1945 period. Second, a contemporary approach promotes interdisciplinary strategies through the use of a large body of vernacular and English language poetry, fiction and art by Pacific Island peoples. Third, it is an era supported, with due caution, by print and electronic media coverage of current events linked to precedents in the recent past. Fourth, the post-1945 era is also the period identified as being characterised by the greatest changes and transformations. Ian Campbell's opinion, in his recent general history, was that 'by the end of the nineteenth century, profound changes had occurred in all three culture areas of the Pacific' but that 'Pacific societies have experienced greater change since independence than before it' (Campbell 1989:149, 228). The ubiquitous concept 'change' appears in nearly all History curriculum statements in Australia. This is matched only by the popularity of the matched pair of concepts 'tradition and change'. The post-1945 Pacific is therefore an ideal vehicle for the exploration of these concepts in classrooms. Whether these contemporary, post-1945 studies should focus on local, national or regional content or whether they should

concentrate only on pragmatic Australia–Pacific relationships, are questions to be addressed by teachers in their own schools.

There is considerable literature on the relationship between tradition, change, national identity, ethnicity and independence (Howard 1989, Linnekin and Poyer 1990, Reynolds 1996). The linking of these concepts in cross-cultural and international studies also can be found in national conference papers, commissioned reports and discussion papers that have attempted in recent years to shape the curriculum in Australian schools. It is found in national and state social education (formerly known as Social Science or Social Studies) curriculum frameworks. Both the Queensland and Victorian statements suggest that students must study other cultures, international relationships and networks and global interdependence, but without specifying that this should focus on the Pacific (QDE 1989, VCAB 1988, VME 1987). The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Social Education course specifically identified Papua New Guinea and the Asia–Pacific region as a focus for case studies of nation states, national interest, security, sovereignty, material prosperity and shared cultural and ideological identification. A now abandoned two-year VCE Australian Studies course also included Australia–Pacific as a focus for one of its four units. Another abandoned VCE History course, ‘Culture Contact in the Pacific’, offered a four-part course on the nineteenth century, which was under pressure changed to include a twentieth century component. The final, fourth unit was called ‘From Colonialism to Independence’. In Tasmania a new senior school history syllabus offers Australian, Asian and Pacific topics in an integrated, comparative approach. A Pacific unit was also added in 1994 to options offered in the Queensland Year 11 and 12 Modern History syllabus. Although independent of these activities, it is also pleasing to note that in the Pacific Islands the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA) has introduced a Pacific History component, worth 40 per cent of the assessment, in the Year 12 History course being taught in six Pacific Island nations (SPBEA, 1995; Quanchi 1990a).

It was claimed at the ‘Teaching Pacific History’ workshop in Auckland in 1986 and at the follow-up workshops in Tonga in 1989, Vanuatu in 1992 and Tarawa in 1994, that Pacific History offered a unique and dynamic learning experience for students. It was claimed by presenters and delegates at these workshops that the study of histories in the Pacific enhances students’ personal growth by forcing them to confront a past that has

contributed significantly to the present, helps develop a sense of self identity and self worth, provides a balance to the Eurocentrism of existing curricula, fosters a greater understanding of cultures within a multinational regional and global context and develops an appreciation of relationships among peoples of the Pacific' (Howe 1986:8). These claims have been repeated at the history teacher workshops now funded by a Pacific Island Nations Fund (SPINF) grant. The TTPF workshops in 1995–96 at Honiara, Hilo, Nadi, Suva, Port Moresby and Port Vila have continued to promote the value and importance of history as a component of the secondary curriculum, aims not dissimilar to those now voiced by history teacher associations in Australia in the face of declining Year 11 and 12 History enrolments. The 1986 Auckland workshop report noted that the study of the Pacific provided a dynamic setting for teaching and research because 'it is constantly being reshaped, approached by different methods and rewritten and because it involves students in a critical analytical process of being aware of self and others' (Howe 1986:8). But so do other subjects in the curriculum. History in schools generally is under siege on all fronts.

Despite the pessimism expressed in the early part of this discussion, there are positive elements to be highlighted. The combined effect of school-based, local activities across a wide front has been to create a resource base and a small cohort of committed individuals. This energy is slowly being translated into the language of schools—projects, units, semester programmes, Board Approved Studies and comparative, thematic courses on Asia and the Pacific. Three as yet unexplored options seem to offer exciting opportunities: comparative units involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History and Pacific History, the pairing of Development Studies with contemporary Pacific History, and the pairing of Pacific History (as content) with gender, film, literature, political and other specialist studies.

For the moment, a new wave of enthusiasm remains only a slight possibility. The range of journals now available, the variety of undergraduate courses and the continuing work of Centres focusing on the Pacific indicate that tertiary level support does exist. Universities remain a mostly untapped resource for teachers. Teachers fired by their own enthusiasm and the recently won freedom to design their own courses are making some impressive, but very localised gains. When links are established between individual and systemic networks, and between academics, curriculum designers and classroom teachers, then the study of the Pacific might be said

to have marshalled its forces. The first example of this sort of unity of purpose was the publication of a school-level text written by twelve university academics, specifically aimed at the Victorian Year 12 Pacific history course (Quanchi and Adams 1993). In 1996 this was followed by the innovative and successful mingling of academics, education managers, curriculum planners, teacher associations and the Australian South Sea Islander community to produce a set of primary and secondary curriculum materials on South Sea Islander culture and history (Moore, Quanchi and Bennett 1996; Quanchi 1996). In 1995–96 the Queensland History Teachers Association also set about developing links with existing and nascent history teacher associations in the Pacific, funded initially by an AusAID grant. It has also published classroom units on the Pacific in its regular journal and established a special ‘Pacific News’ insert in each edition. In Sydney, consistent attempts have been made, formally and informally, to develop Pacific materials and guides and to establish networks of interested teachers, not only in schools with a high Pacific Islander student enrolment, but in suburban schools generally.

There is not a given set of facts that Australian students need to know about the Pacific. The reward for introducing Pacific content into history courses is that the distorted and ill-informed reports that children see, hear or read in the media will not go unchallenged, that students will have access to debates where their own opinions can gain expression, and that through their studies they will gain a reflective, critical and informed appreciation of their own lives and those of the neighbouring people of Oceania. The difficulty is not how to teach and what to teach. The greatest obstacle is where (in the school curriculum) and when (between K and 12), and this is ground contested by lobbyists and protagonists of many powerful persuasions. For the moment Australians are obsessed with Asia, and the Pacific seems destined to remain a sort of distant, rarely acknowledged other place.

Notes

1. It has involved reflection on the fortunes of Pacific History as a discipline, and my own teaching, research and involvement in promoting the teaching of Pacific histories in schools, to revise a paper first presented at the 25th Biennial ANZAAS Congress, held at the University of Tasmania, February 1990. That paper was subsequently revised for different audiences and presented at the national Curriculum Directions and Planning Conference at Griffith University, June 1990 and the national conference of the Australian Association of Social Educators, held at the University of Melbourne, July 1990. Earlier versions were published in *The History Teacher* and in *Ethos Annual* (Quanchi 1990a, 1993a). As my own history changes, my view of History's place in schools also changes. I view the opportunity offered by Doug Munro to revise again as a chance to speak to another audience and to share different pathways for the permeation of Pacific content through the school curriculum.

2. Special editions on the Pacific, or parts thereof, have appeared in *Risk*, 12:1 (1976); *Development News Digest*, June 1979; *Dyason House Papers*, 7:1 (1980); *Hemisphere*, 25:2 (1980); *New Internationalist*, 101 (July 1981); *Transnational Brief*, 8 (1981); *World Review*, 23:1 (1984); *Meanjin*, 34:3 (1975), 37:1 (1978), 41:4 (1982), 49:4 (1990), 53:4 (1994); *Photofile*, 6:3 (1988); *Social Alternatives*, 8:2 (1989); and *The History Teacher*, 31:3 (1993).

3. Malama Meleisea and others, 'Samoan history', manuscript; personal communication, 1989.

4. The newly elected Australian Prime Minister John Howard suggested in 1996 that History classrooms placed too much emphasis on racism, bigotry, invasion and genocide in relation to Aboriginal Australians. He seemed to deny that the past is linked to the present through memory, attitudes, policies and practice and asked that history courses tone down the bad aspects of Australia's past (radio interview, 2UE, Sydney, 24 Oct 1996; ABCTV's 7.30 Report, 25 Oct 1996; 'PM Rejects Black History Doctoring Charge', *Weekend Australian*, 26–27 Oct 1996).

5. The major themes in this draft course outline were accompanied by sub-topics which developed each theme more fully. The outline was offered in a discussion on possible frameworks. It was presented as an example of current approaches to teaching history in New Zealand schools. See Wood 1989.

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