

# The wheel keeps turning: A critical reflection on PIC<sup>1</sup> partnerships in educational development

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*Current government discourses on partnerships tend to assume an uncritical belief in the existence of equal ownership and equal power relations between development partners and partner governments. The rhetoric of shared visions, common strategic directions or complementary approaches to development in the Pacific begs the question of how such visions and directions are interpreted by the 'partners', and especially how ideas look once they become funded development projects/programmes. This paper takes a critical postcolonial perspective of practice, past and present, and explores whether these partnerships are 'working' or whether the wheel of international development assistance goes round and round without much visible change. The author first examines the topic from a theoretical and policy perspective. She then utilises examples from her experience in Pacific education as consultant and researcher, using Samoa as an illustrative case.*

*[Keywords: international development partnerships; postcolonialism; aid discourse; Samoa]*

## Introduction

With a focus on relationships between Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), current government discourses call attention to the benefits of partnerships between governments, with the private sector, with non-government organisations (NGOs) and with international agencies. At the grass roots level, most NGOs refer to partnerships in activities that anticipate shared ownership and equal power relations. At government levels, partnerships still tend to be construed formally as agreements that draw more from the Australian requirements than those of the Pacific Island Country. Nevertheless, historically speaking, the recent emphasis on partnership discourse is a far cry from the donor/recipient discourse of thirty to forty years ago. In this paper, some of the transformations in policy and practice between the late 1970s and the present are discussed and critiqued. In many respects, the

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<sup>1</sup> PIC is the acronym for Pacific Island Country.

changes in policy are indeed transformative. However, today's rhetoric of shared visions, common strategic directions or complementary approaches to development in the Pacific leaves many questions unanswered. Rather than review systematically the history of the changes, my purpose is more to reflect on how the changes have been responded to by those in the field, and to consider whether history is repeating itself, including some of the development practices that continue to have a negative impact. My perspective comes from a critical postcolonial theoretical standpoint.

The background to this paper is partly autobiographical, partly based on decades of research and practice. A somewhat peripatetic life took me into fields of publishing, advertising, and teaching, living variously in cities and rural villages, on the road, and in organisations and educational institutions in different parts of the world. It gradually came to my consciousness that the crucial and common element in all these areas of work was the context of intercultural interaction. My original research approach was therefore a qualitative exploration of intercultural interactions between Australian aid workers and their Pacific Island 'counterparts', specifically in Samoa (Fox, 1992). My systematic ethnographic doctoral study over several months involved observations of intercultural training courses, interviews with key stakeholders, reviews of materials, and follow-up observations, interviews and group reflections.

Since that time, my research reports have been based on my participation in educational development projects and programmes, project design, monitoring and evaluation as researcher, specialist and team leader on several occasions, in Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Philippines and Sri Lanka. Politically it was very clear that, prior to 2002, most of these interactions were strategically developed according to criteria set mainly by the donor country or donor agency (e.g. ADB, World Bank) more than in partnership with the recipient country. I argue in this paper that many of these donor-driven projects were marred by intercultural miscommunication and the distorted communication that arises where power relations are unequal. In doing so I draw on Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action as described in the next section, which also makes some brief reference to background literature and theory related to some early development assistance projects in the Pacific.

The paper then moves on to examine the recently published *Report of the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness* (Hollway, Denton, Farmer, Howes & Reid, 2011) and AusAID's responses to the recommendations in the Review (AusAID, 2011). The last part of the paper analyses and reflects on changes to development assistance processes, using Samoa as a case in point.

## **Background**

This section of the paper combines an historical comparative methodology within a theoretical framework based on the communicative action theory of Jürgen Habermas, and perspectives of postcolonialism. The historical background demonstrates changes since the 1970s.

Nearly 20 years ago, I gave the following critique of the accepted wisdom on development assistance in the 1970s. The critique today still resonates with current issues and concerns, yet at the same time demonstrates how far we have come in this era of globalisation and increased understanding (*italics have been added*).

In our perusal of *what Europeans call educational development* in the Third World—that is, the development of *formal and nonformal schooling systems*—we mainly have access to European viewpoints, and only gradually are Pacific viewpoints gaining an international readership. As Philip Altbach and Gail Kelly have noted, European understanding of educational needs in the Pacific was quite clearly *Eurocentric* (Altbach & Kelly, 1984). Many educators from industrialised countries, who today advise Pacific island educators on policy and practice, still act and communicate in a similarly Eurocentric way. Intercultural communication in Western Samoa and other Pacific Island states has thus been and remains an underlying cause of tension in educational policy making (Hindson, 1988). It is suggested that, where there are joint endeavours by local educators and educators from other cultures, the politics and practice of educational development in the Pacific *need to reflect a more equal relationship*, so that attempted intercultural communicative action is *free from the coercion implicit in structural power inequalities*. Worldviews are still constrained by temporal bias, by an inability to interpret history, a lack of hermeneutic understanding (Fox, 1992, p.235).

It is interesting to note that in 1992 my scepticism of the word *development* was clearly visible, and led to my delivering another paper subtitled “Calling for the death of the development metaphor” not much later (Fox, 1996). At the time, most educational projects in the Pacific were related to *formal schooling systems*, showing a narrow understanding of the educational potential beyond the school system. Education as school system is the tip of the iceberg; today funding also includes areas such as scholarship programmes, infrastructure, community health, capacity building, higher education, governance, emergency aid, and of course the whole communication network around ICT. The third italicised comment, about the *Eurocentricity* of educational policy and practice shows that although globalisation was gradually having greater influence in the 1980s and early 1990s, the common expression was Eurocentricity, not even Americanisation. The last point of emphasis remains a concern, that of *structural (unequal) power relations*, a theme developed throughout this paper.

When discussing the history of intercultural relations between Pacific Island nations and the colonial powers, it is important to maintain a historical consciousness as well as an awareness of context-specific interpretations. While there are both flaws and strengths in the arguments for and against a particularistic concept of culture in context, without at least an understanding of the colonial historical background, the Pacific Island states’ relations with Australia, for example, cannot make much sense.

Keith Watson, a prolific author and long-time authority in comparative education theory and practice, wrote *Education and the Third World* (Watson, 1972), a classic account of colonial governments’ attempts to provide education for

‘development’ at a time when colonial governments were being replaced by governments in a new independence or post-colonial era. The Pacific Island nations were emerging over this period (the first to become independent was Western Samoa, in 1962). Watson confirms in this early publication what we all know today: that the direct transference of European ideas on education was attempted with little reference to local contexts, a habit difficult for the former colonial powers to overcome (see also Crossley, 1984; Crossley & Tikly, 2004).

My approach to the history of intercultural relations between the colonised and the colonisers, both in the early days and after independence has been developed from theories of communicative action developed by Jürgen Habermas, where he contrasted *strategic communication* with *authentic communication* (Habermas 1981, 1984).

*Strategic communication* is where the motivation behind the event is to convince the other to change, or to commit to action (e.g. follow an order) rather than first reach an understanding. Those who are not dominant may use different strategies in order to obtain benefit. *Manipulated communication* concerns one speaker using their power overtly or covertly over the other to manoeuvre them to a situation of advantage to themselves. *Distorted communication* is where the language is used by the dominant speaker to deceive or create hidden meanings that distort the transmitted meaning and it is not able to be repaired. A *miscommunication*, on the other hand, can be repaired by explaining a misunderstanding, and adapting the language so that both speakers understand the intended meaning. In this case, the strategic communication events are exemplified through the lens of unequal power relations, where each party assumes the other is distorting the veracity of exchanges.

In contrast authentic communication events would ideally be exemplified through genuine partnerships among the protagonists. Philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas maintained that, for authentic communication to take place, certain validity claims must be satisfied (Habermas, 1984, p.99). In summary, Habermas' validity claims are that what the person is saying must be:

- true, as far as that person knows;
- truthful, or sincere;
- normatively appropriate, in terms of that person's understanding of cultural norms; and
- comprehensible to the other person.

Authentic communication implies, as Hans-Georg Gadamer states, the opening of oneself to the full power of what the 'other' is saying. He showed that such an opening does not entail agreement but rather the to-and-fro play of dialogue (Gadamer, 1989). It is this potential which researchers in intercultural situations can celebrate. Seyla Benhabib calls this "core intuition" (Benhabib, 1992, p.37).

In my work I have characterised an authentic communicative situation as:

- an honourable kind of conversation based on mutual trust and a respectful sharing of intended meanings;

- requiring a sense of resonance between those who seek to reach agreement and understanding, whether it be intuitively, or poetically, or by identifying shared moral values experientially, or through rational discourse;
- dismissing the idea that cultural incompatibility is more or less inevitable; and
- letting go the idea that those who identify with non-dominant cultures need to conform to the dominant way.

Admittedly, Habermas developed the theory of communicative action assuming that there would be cultural and linguistic commonality. It seems, therefore, it was a natural progression for comparativists with a critical theory background to move from Habermas' critical theory of communicative action to a critical postcolonial perspective, as Crossley, Tikly and many others have done (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Hickling-Hudson, Matthews & Woods, 2004; Fox, 1999).

A postcolonial perspective is a useful way to describe the effect on societies of movements of people to and from former colonies, and to analyse the consequences in a global context of power and domination, economic privilege, political resistance and the emergence of the subaltern voice (Spivak, 1990; Hickling-Hudson et al. 2004; Fox, 2008). It is seen in the assumptions made by educators about what knowledge is worthwhile and accepted and who is heard. It is seen also in the competing interests of local and global knowledge.

A postcolonial lens refers not only to a critique of society, culture and power relations in countries that were once colonised, but also to the ways in which numerous expressions of 'culture' increasingly move across territorial borders, as well as to the complex influences of global connections through media and new technologies. It refers to those people whose international work crosses nation-states (community workers, consultants, teachers, engineers, disaster relief workers etc), migrants, refugees, tourists. Theorists of postcolonial education talk of the postcolonial imagination, where learners choose from a vast array of cultural sources, so that binary opposites of coloniser/colonised no longer have meaning (Fox, 2008).

In this issue of IEJ several authors have presented their own interpretations of 'partnerships' in specific contexts and within specific programmes. In most cases these have been compared with official government and partner viewpoints. Fortuitously an independent key review of aid effectiveness in the context of AusAID has recently been published (Hollway et al., 2011). This review represents a significant milestone for AusAID, as it is the first major review in 15 years. In the Review, considerable space is given to the reviewers' interpretations of AusAID's 'partnerships'. As expected, differing conceptions of the term appear between government strategies and methodologies in 'delivering' aid on the one hand, and on the other hand, conceptions of the term by some NGOs such as Oxfam Australia. A summary of some major ideas put forward by Hollway et al., together with AusAID's and other responses are discussed in the next section of the paper.

## **Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness**

When AusAID commissioned an independent review of its aid policies and programs in 2010 it was the first major review in 15 years. *The Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness* (Hollway et al., 2011) was completed in April 2011, and the AusAID response was made public in July 2011. Both the review and AusAID's response addressed, among other things, the relationships between Australia and the countries where AusAID was contributing aid. This review follows a number of significant meetings and discussions, including the historic meeting in Port Moresby in 2008, of Pacific Island leaders with Kevin Rudd, then Prime Minister of Australia. The 'Port Moresby Declaration' (AusAID, 2008, n.p.) is described as the intention to pursue new and more robust development goals with Pacific island countries. According to AusAID,

Pacific Partnerships for Development commit Australia and our Pacific partners to work together to make more rapid progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and our partners' own development ambitions. ...The fundamental principles underlying Pacific Partnerships for Development are mutual respect and mutual responsibility.

Another key step in the process of forming significant partnerships occurred at the 40<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum held in August 2009 in the city of Cairns, Queensland (AusAID, 2009). At this meeting the delegates signed the Cairns Compact on strengthening development coordination in the Pacific. Among a raft of commitments to report and put into practice improved development plans, the last comment on the document was that "Leaders also agreed that, ultimately, national development plans were matters for national governments to determine" (AusAID, 2009).

For the purposes of this paper, some reflections on educational aid in the Pacific in general, and on the concept of 'partnerships' in particular, provide insights into the next phase of AusAID's ongoing work.

### **Country-wide programmes and partnerships**

Since the earlier days of Pacific aid from both Australia and New Zealand, when most work was conducted through specific projects for specific activities and generally directed by the donor countries, aid agencies have gradually developed a broader view concerning programmes. Within a programme perspective, financing was less micro-managed, but was still directed at a well-defined programme and earmarked for a particular area in the education sector. Nevertheless, it became clear that many aid-focussed programmes were operating with input from more than one aid donor. One of the chief incapacitating issues was the lack of coordination among aid donors, which was a burden for the so-called recipient countries and caused major contradictions for the country's development progress. A case in point from my own experience was when two major international agencies were undertaking a sector review of education in one of the southeast Asian countries. The upshot was that one half of the country was to focus on teacher training for a new school curriculum with support from Donor A, and the other half of the country was to focus on curriculum reform

supported by Donor B. The potential chaos arising from this arrangement was that in one part of the country teachers were being trained in the existing school curriculum while enhancing their skills (in anticipation of a new curriculum?), and in the other part of the country curriculum developers were introducing a new curriculum to teachers who were not being upgraded in knowledge or skills.

While this example of confusing programme designs is a rather extreme example, it illustrates the need for a move towards country programmes with more ownership by the country concerned, greater coordination, greater flexibility, and potentially greater effectiveness of outcomes. The World Bank and others have increasingly emphasized the importance of partnerships of varying kinds between country government and international development agency, between government and government, between NGO and community and so on (World Bank, 2011). Elizabeth Cassity, for instance, has provided a clear outline and examination of current debates about programmes and partnerships in educational assistance to less industrialized countries (Cassity, 2010). In her article she highlights both the successes in creating better educational opportunities and the concerns of some less successful forms of aid. In many circles, she comments, it is debated whether aid is more a problem than a solution (Cassity 2011, p.510). Cassity cites a comment by Phillip Jones (2007) who talks about how “important issues arise about the *practical outworking of global power relations* (my italics)” (Jones, 2007, p.326, cited in Cassity, 2011, p.510).

In terms of AusAID’s policies, Cassity notes that “the AusAID’s policy discourse between 2006 and 2009 indicates an active effort to develop partnerships in education with donors and partner governments. Discourse in policy documents also indicates an agency shift to supporting sector-wide approaches in education” (Cassity, 2010, p.515). Nevertheless, it also appears that AusAID’s aid programme uses the term ‘partnership’ in a rather different way from some of the non-government organisations (NGOs) as illustrated in their submissions to AusAID.

### **Differing concepts of partnership**

The review of aid effectiveness (Hollway et al., 2011) included detailed discussion on the concept of partnership. They agreed that the partnership arrangements with international agencies, governments, NGOs and others “generally involve commitments to engagement above and beyond aid delivery, covering areas such as policy dialogue and joint analytical work” (Hollway et al., 2011, p.181). Several Australian NGOs reported positive experiences with these arrangements, as did the World Food Program (WFP) and United Nations children’s Fund (UNICEF). Hollway et al. emphasised that partnership agreements should only be signed “where there are clear benefits from doing so and dedicated senior management resources can be made available” (p.181).

The reviewers also reminded AusAID that there were dangers in micro-management. As Hollway et al. (2011) stated:

...micromanagement of partners (especially in cases where partners clearly have greater expertise than the AusAID staff managing them) defeats the

purpose of partnership. The extent of AusAID's management should be agreed between AusAID and the partner up-front. Different levels of management will be appropriate for different partners. The aim should be to give trusted and effective partners freedom to manage for results in their own systems, and to rely largely on their own reporting. The proviso is that they need to be able to feed in, in a quick and uncomplicated way, to the Australian government's measurement and reporting system (p.182).

Taking Oxfam Australia as an example of one of the larger NGOs that sent a submission to the review, there was a welcome response to the concept of partnership, although the concept is interpreted somewhat differently from the AusAID reviewers and also from the later response by AusAID. Oxfam Australia "recognises the value of partnership and allows a degree of flexibility regarding the use of funds to achieve shared objectives". The agreement identifies important principles for the partnership, including "*mutual respect and cooperation, the sharing of ideas and open communication* (my italics)" (Oxfam Australia, 2011, p.44).

The submission by Oxfam Australia also points out how implementing partnership agreements can be difficult, saying that despite the potential for flexibility and dialogue,

the approach adopted has at times been more prescriptive. Moreover, understanding and interpretation of the partnership agreement varies among different staff. Clearer systems and processes are required within AusAID to provide guidance to staff on what the Partnership Agreement – and the notion of partnership itself – means in practice. (Oxfam Australia, 2011, p.44)

Oxfam also noted in its submission how important a country-driven model is, saying that the countries concerned "should set their own development plans" which would be consistent with the aid effectiveness principles set out in the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, in particular those that emphasise country ownership and leadership (2011, p.44).

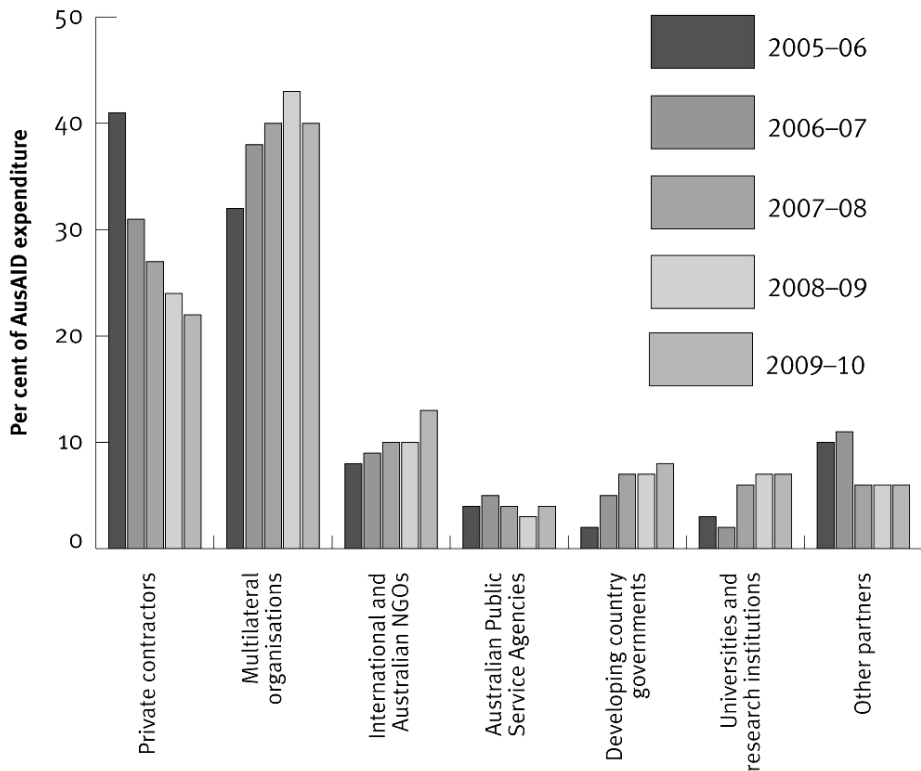
AusAID's response to the independent review of aid effectiveness also outlined their concept of partnership, giving examples of the use of partners in the Australian aid programme 2005-2006 and 2009-2010 (see Figure 1). The Pacific and East Asia were specifically mentioned in the following statements:

- Australia will use delivery mechanisms and partnerships that are effective and achieve results.
- Direct country-to-country delivery will remain our primary vehicle of assistance in East Asia and the Pacific, where Australia is a major donor and where we have a well-established field presence. In these countries, Australia will take a donor leadership role, particularly in the Pacific where Australia provides around half of all ODA.
- In view of our global interests, we will increase the support we provide to global initiatives and multilateral organisations with proven records of effectiveness. In doing so, Australia will



strengthen its engagement in the strategic direction and governance of these organisations (AusAID 2011, p.44).

**Figure 1. Use of partners in the Australian aid program 2005–06 to 2009–10: per cent of AusAID expenditure**



Source: AusAID (2011, p.49)

### A short postcolonial observation

Using these examples from the reports, several observations may be made. The first is that the AusAID presentation of ‘partnership’ is a strategic alliance, one that continues to indicate greater ownership by Australian agencies, managers and Australian financial stipulations. Second, there are hints that micro-management tends to be a factor of control, or as Phillip Jones has said, a concern for the practical outworking of global power arrangements (Cassidy, 2011). Within the dominant aid effectiveness discourse terms such as ‘demonstrated effectiveness’, ‘donor leadership role’, and ‘maintaining strong monitoring and evaluation procedures’, may be important issues in themselves, but they assume greater power over the partnership than that pertaining to their partners. To some extent this reflects accepted management practice, although it does verge on the maintenance of the status quo; the relationship of the powerful and the disempowered.

In contrast, the Oxfam document looks careful at the quality of the interactions, and of the humanitarian purpose of the programs.

AusAID should monitor inequality - including gender inequality – and the degree to which the development cooperation program is enabling the least powerful and most marginalised groups to be heard, exercise choice, be engaged in the development process, and be empowered to hold to account those who exercise power. It should also encourage consideration of equality measures in MDG monitoring processes. (Oxfam Australia, 2011, p.49)

Clearly there has been an enormous progression beyond the level of discourse in the quality of agreements and the quality and effectiveness of aid, which can be gleaned to some extent from the comments of reviewers, the submissions from stakeholders, and the emergence of more holistic understandings of what ‘development’ can mean. Even so, the literature is full of stories of failed programmes, inappropriate aid work, greater conflict, and no resolution for illiteracy, poverty, ineffective health programmes, and much other disappointing evidence.

In summary, while there has been a significant level of discourse on partnerships and development, there is also a sense that many of the goals of development have yet to be achieved. On the one hand the level of educational provision in the Pacific Islands has noticeably increased, but the relationships between the Pacific Island countries and major donors remains an issue of postcolonial critique. The question is whether and why the wheel keeps turning without significant change.

The following short autobiographical narrative is an illustration of one researcher’s perspective of one country, that of Samoa. The focus is based on autobiographical historical narrative.

## **Reflections: Samoa**

European contact with Pacific Island cultures developed at first on the basis of visitor-host relationships. Early visitors who came and went were the window-shoppers for Europe, and only gradually did Europeans stop to look more closely at some of the wares. It took several generations before Europeans came to stay and then to buy and finally to take and plunder. In Samoa, the greater and more influence was through the missionary work of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Once the visitors claimed a right to intervene, as traders or as missionaries and later as colonisers, the relationships changed. Once ownership was assumed, the European colonisers took on such roles as administrator, teacher, exploiter, law enforcer and occasionally friend. Some Europeans married locally and they and their children gradually formed a recognised part of the local society. Nevertheless, although it was the Europeans who determined what roles they played, the Samoans subtly subverted the European system to continue their own roles and eventually regain political independence (Uesele, personal communication, 1989, in Fox, 1992).

Partnerships are about relationships, whether they be personal, professional or organisational. To move from coloniser to partner is historically a difficult change to make. External influence in nineteenth century Samoa moved from traders and missionaries into formal colonisation by the Germans in 1900, and

after the First World War New Zealand took over administration. Independence for Western Samoa came in 1962<sup>2</sup>. Much of the educational infrastructure was based on the New Zealand system in 1962, and New Zealand still plays a prominent part in providing educational assistance. New Zealand consultants tended to have an easier relationship with their Samoan advisers in the second half of the twentieth century and into the present, based on a partnership that assumes greater equality of ownership, mutual respect and understanding (Afamasaga, personal communication, 1992), a situation that reflects Habermas' theory of authentic communicative action (Habermas, 1981), even though unequal power relations are evident financially and politically.

In the late 1970s, it was still highly unusual for Australian consultants to take up long-term technical assistance appointments in Samoa in the field of education. Moreover, residential status for members of UN agencies or the World Bank was frowned upon, because of the commonly held belief that the income of most Samoans would not be able to afford rising prices for their daily needs if large-scale developments of super-markets and stores were to be opened in the capital Apia. Many consultants of various kinds had spent short sojourns there, but in education these were mostly limited to, for example, looking at the problems of technical education at the Technical College, and conversing at length to the Principal of the Primary Teachers College. Samoa College was the key secondary school in the country, officially opened in 1953 by C.E. Beeby (1966), a well known New Zealand educationist<sup>3</sup>. A majority of teachers in local village primary schools were not educated much beyond primary school, or the New Zealand influenced intermediate school, known as Le'ififi, in Apia. Even though they completed two years at the Primary Teachers College, they were ill equipped to take students further than Standard Four.

In 1978, in August, in a project funded through AIDAB, as AusAID was then known, the Western Samoa Secondary Teachers' College (STC) officially opened<sup>4</sup>. The STC's priority aim was to train teachers to work in the newly planned Junior Secondary Schools (JSS), to be located in some 20 villages to cater for students going beyond primary level (Year 8). The new staff of the STC started with few resources, no library or purpose built lecture rooms, and at that point no set curriculum or long-term plan. Their staff room was a small room at the back of an old section of one of the buildings at the Malifa campus in Apia. The trainee students were either seconded from primary schools around the

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<sup>2</sup> After World War II, Western Samoa was a Trust Territory of the United Nations, administered by New Zealand until 1962 and independence. On the 4th July 1997, the name of the country was changed to the Independent State of Samoa, or Samoa, by a constitutional amendment. In this paper, Samoa is used throughout.

<sup>3</sup> Charles E. Beeby's book *The quality of education in developing countries* (1966) became a classic text for scholars researching educational development. A biographical tribute to this eminent educational adviser was written by W. L. Renwick and published in *Prospect* in 1998 (Renwick, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> The stories of the Teachers Colleges in Samoa and relationships with donor countries are based on personal experience and information provided by key informants, Gaufa Uesele and Tili Afamasaga.

country, or recent graduates from Samoa College, so that both in-service and pre-service teacher training took place. Rather than separate these students, they collaborated with each other so that the Samoa College students could assist the in-service teachers with the study skills, and the in-service students assisted the younger ones to understand professional pedagogy. The college began with some 20 students and a handful of lecturers, including Gaufa Uesele as founding lecturer, two other lecturers from Samoa, two Australian three-year contracted lecturers (myself and my husband), and the Principal who was an expatriate who had settled many years before in Samoa, had taught at the Primary Teachers College, and was an ardent fan of Bloom's Taxonomy. There was no allocated accommodation for the expatriate lecturers, and we were lent a Samoan house in one of the villages on the road between Apia and the airport, where we stayed for about a year before moving back into town near Samoa College in the village of Vaivase.

About every four months, advisers from Australia visited the college for two to three weeks at a time, to discuss progress and the curriculum at the STC. Interestingly, there was no formal monitoring or evaluation, and it soon became clear that there was very little mutual understanding between the advisers and locally hired lecturers. As one of the Australian consultant lecturers in-country, I found myself forming a closer partnership with the Samoan team than I did with the Australian advisers. Unlike the New Zealand advisers to the schools and Samoa College, the Australian group had little experience of Samoa and, in my recollection, did not seem to expect that the relationship would resemble a partnership.

In the second year of the STC's development, Tili Afamasaga joined the staff, and in the third year an Australian teacher with an Agricultural degree was appointed Principal. The first graduates from STC were awarded a secondary teaching Diploma in Education in 1980. Many of them became Junior Secondary School Principals, and at least three of these founding students returned to Apia to become lecturers in the STC and later at the National University of Samoa. The Faculty of Education at the university was opened in 1987, the founding Dean being Tili Afamasaga. Her leadership and vision has consistently supported a curriculum that emphasises not only professional education but also requires a sound knowledge and understanding of Samoan language, culture and the arts. The campus is purpose built by architects and builders who consulted with Afamasaga (personal communication, 2010) to ensure appropriate practical rooms and lecture spaces were adequate.

Today, most of the JSS schools are now full high schools. The teacher trainees complete high school before entering the university. There are a number of country-wide programs which include education and are assisted through formally agreed partnerships with not only Australia and New Zealand, but also with multilateral agencies, UNESCO, the OECD, Asia Development Bank and the World Bank. Moreover, many South-South partnerships are created to run important education collaborative programs across the Pacific, particularly with

those countries associated with the University of the South Pacific (USP) (Thaman, personal communication, 2011).

There is a sense of Samoan leadership and ownership of the education development in the country. There is also a sense of frustration, felt in Samoa and many other PICs, at the increasing power over decision-making in higher education development. The development of Pacific studies, Cultural Studies, Pacific Perspectives and the like in the USP and in Samoa have been included in carefully designed sets of curricula. In the name of vocational and economic imperatives, these higher education studies are in danger of being pulled apart or even discontinued by some so-called partners in development.

## Conclusion

The AusAID response to the 2011 (p.40) review states:

Australia is committed to a strengthened engagement with our Pacific island neighbours through the Pacific Partnerships for Development. These partnerships focus on mutual commitments with Pacific countries to achieve concrete development results. These commitments include reforms to boost the delivery of basic health and education services and enhance economic growth.

Eleven bilateral Partnerships for Development have been signed...with the leaders of Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati in 2008–09; Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu in 2009–10; and the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and Palau in 2010–11.

Real progress is being made under these Partnerships, especially in getting more children into school. For example, Australia has worked with governments in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Samoa to eliminate school fees, leading to rapid increases in school enrolments. In Vanuatu, 3000 more children enrolled in school in 2010 with the help of an Australian supported initiative. In Samoa, we have helped 160 disabled children access schooling and support services.

On the other hand, the Oxfam Australia submission put emphasis on shared ownership and responsibility and the need for a much broader understanding of gender inequality. A telling recommendation was:

Recommendation 31: AusAID should monitor inequality - including gender inequality – and the degree to which the development cooperation program is enabling the least powerful and most marginalised groups to be heard, exercise choice, be engaged in the development process, and be empowered to hold to account those who exercise power. It should also encourage consideration of equality measures in MDG monitoring processes. (Oxfam Australia, 2011, p.48)

In concluding this paper the question is asked: has anything changed in the concept of partnerships in educational development assistance? Certainly there is evidence of progress in education and certainly the globalisation of education is clearly apparent in the Pacific. It is encouraging that relationships between personnel in the partnerships are intended to be cooperative and collaborative.

Yet AusAID policy discourse seems still to assume micromanagement, and continues rhetoric such as ‘proven effectiveness’ which can override the intention of partnerships for improvement. A postcolonial analysis of programmes and policies reveals that there is still a way to go to ‘disrupt’ the neo-colonial language of aid donors.

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