

UKFIET Conference 2015: Learning for Sustainable Futures. Making the Connections.

15 – 17 September 2015, University of Oxford

DRAFT Symposium Proposal

Contextual Values, Teacher Education and Sustainable Futures: learning from Pacific experience and perspectives

Overall Rationale

In the development of sustainable futures for education, particular attention needs to be given to the importance of culture, context and locally grounded knowledge. This Symposium draws upon original research on the nature, quality and relevance of teacher education in Fiji, and fieldwork that engages directly with Pacific values, perspectives and methodologies to inform more contextually appropriate and sustainable futures. The research is being carried out through partnership connections between the University of the South Pacific, the University of Bristol and the University of Nottingham. This is funded by the British Academy and USP and is designed to identify how Pacific values, cultures and contexts are influencing new priorities and trajectories for teacher education policy and practice. Particular attention is being given to the nature and potential of indigenous knowledge, traditional values and locally grounded approaches to research. This aims to contribute to the emergence of innovative methodologies, and to the development of future teacher education identities, curricula and pedagogy in such contexts. While the impact of international trends and developments are examined the research builds upon our previous work that highlights what the broader international community can learn from the experience of small island developing states (SIDS). In doing so, attention is also given to the distinctive environmental and economic challenges faced by SIDS and their implications for education, and teacher education, for sustainable development.

Paper 1:

Becoming and Being a Teacher: Fijian understandings of teachers' work and lives and their implications for the improvement of teaching and learning quality

Presenters: Ledua Waqailiti and Simon McGrath

Current international debates about development post-2015 place quality at the centre of educational thinking. This has strategic implications for the future of teacher education policy and practice. Given the challenge of balancing global goals with local contexts, the study focuses on a highly diverse region, marginalised from international policy debates: the Pacific Island Countries (PICs), and on Fiji in particular. Like other small states, PICs have responded to quality challenges by targeting teacher education. This has seen policy borrowing and the application of external standards, despite international evidence indicating that many such reforms fail due to misarticulation with the diverse realities of schools, systems and societies in which teachers work and live. To transcend this, our research analyses local and national conceptualisations of quality education and teacher identities and capabilities, and explores the influence of powerful structural dynamics and global agendas through their impact upon teachers and teacher education.

Paper 2 :**Towards Hybrid Research Methodologies for Teacher Education Research in the Pacific**

Presenters: Frances Koya....Michael Crossley and Terra Sprague

The benefits of indigenous research methodologies and methods have been deliberated by a number of Pacific scholars for the last two decades. It has been argued that the use of culturally relevant values and methodological frameworks enables a deeper analysis and more contextually sensitive understanding and interpretation of research findings. While such approaches have gained some momentum most educational research conducted within the Pacific region still relies upon and applies mainstream western theoretical and methodological models, designs and strategies. This has clear implications for the values underpinning educational research in the Pacific, and for the knowledge, skills and competencies required by both researchers and learners. This paper addresses these issues and explores the potential of hybrid research methodologies that mix Pacific and Western approaches and modalities in ways that may prove more effective, grounded and sustainable. It is argued that there is much to be learned from a blended or mixed methodological approach to educational research within the Pacific region, and that there is much that others working in international development and within the field of comparative and international education can learn from this distinctive experience. The analysis draws upon the experience of original and ongoing North-South collaborative research, jointly funded by the British Academy and The University of the South Pacific, on current practice, emergent trends and sustainable futures for teacher education in the Pacific.

Paper 3:**Cross-cultural Educational Research Partnerships. Reflections on Pacific experience and collaboration**

Presenters: Michael Crossley, Frances Koya and Ledua Waqailiti

The literature on international research partnerships has grown rapidly across many fields and disciplines in recent decades, with initial work emphasising the potential and benefits to be gained from such developments. Within this, much attention has also been given to North –South research collaboration, with increasing numbers of accounts presenting detailed case studies of successful initiatives. To date, however, few studies have focussed explicitly upon the process of collaboration in ways that have generated critical reflection, and have improved our collective understanding of the dilemmas encountered in sustaining cross-cultural research partnerships. This paper explores the origins, strengths and limitations of one North-South research partnership, relating to teacher education in Fiji, in which we have been involved. The analysis draws upon the related international literature, interrogates the partnership experience from a diversity of cultural and professional perspectives, and explores ways of generating more context sensitive and sustainable research partnerships for future educational and social research in the Pacific.

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NOTE: only papers 1 and 2 are being presented in the symposium

Becoming and Being a Teacher: Fijian Understandings of Teachers' Work and Lives and their Implications for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning Quality

Ledua Waqailiti, University of the South Pacific, Simon McGrath, University of Nottingham, Frances Koya Vaka'uta, University of the South Pacific, Michael Crossley and Terra Sprague, University of Bristol

Globally, attention in the field of education and development increasingly is focused on the challenge of meeting the new education targets enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals about to be launched in New York. As the Education for All era drew to its close, the debate in the recent past shifted to an emphasis on the importance of quality learning outcomes, something that had been stressed at Jomtien but neglected subsequently. This has eventually coalesced into a new overarching global educational goal that promises to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".

Whilst there continues to be a right-wing attack on teachers as obstacles to improvement (e.g., Moe 2012) and a continued faith in technological solutions that can by-pass them (e.g., Negroponce 2006), there has been a renewed policy emphasis on the central role that teachers play in the achievement of quality education. A new wave of OECD-based literature (e.g., McKinsey 2007) has been supplemented by the focusing of the 2014 Global Monitoring Report on teaching and learning – including a major focus on teachers' recruitment, remuneration and retention (UNESCO-GMR 2014) and the UN Secretary-General's reaffirmation at the launch of the UN Global Initiative on Education in September 2012 of his belief in the centrality of teachers to educational improvement (Moon 2012). This process has led to a commitment in the SDG Zero Draft that:

By 2030, increase by [x] per cent the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States (United Nations 2015: 12)

For this paper, the explicit mention of small island development states is particularly pertinent, as we are interested in the case of Fiji. Concerns about quality and the role of the teacher are manifest too in the Pacific Island region where longstanding concerns include low quality education and teachers as well as continued evidence of low levels of literacy, numeracy and life-skills of school leavers (PIFS 2009, 2011, 2012). Indeed, it may be argued that such issues have received relatively developed attention in the Pacific Islands due to the region's high levels of achievement of the education Millennium Development Goals. Thus, there is considerable potential for the global debate to be informed by experiences in the region (Crossley et al. 2011), yet the direction of intended travel appears to be entirely in the other direction.

Globally, one well-trodden path from this concern about teachers is to target initial teacher education, often through reform of teacher education institutions; changes in the length and nature of the practicum; through the development of new competency standards for beginning teachers; and/or continuous professional development of teachers and school administrators. In the Pacific Islands these issues have also been pertinent and, also, there has been considerable innovation around the uses of distance and flexible learning in teacher education and development.

Whilst we are concerned too about the challenge of improving educational quality and the opportunities to support teacher professional development in the pursuit of this goal, we stress that this has to be understood within local contexts. Thus, our core question is:

how are issues of teacher becoming, being and belonging understood in Fiji by various stakeholders and what implications does this have for the drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

However, we are also informed by a set of wider critical perspectives. In order to answer the above question we must also be concerned about the nature of teachers' work and lives; how this is shaped profoundly by cultures, especially gender discourses and practices; the ways in which it relates to broader educational system dynamics; and finally, how this all interacts with the wider political economy of development. In the next section, we will briefly sketch out these wider perspectives. In its final form this paper will then reflect on an empirical investigation of these themes in the Fijian context. However, this paper was written when the data was still being analysed.

Critical perspectives

At present, a growing aspect of the debate about post-2015 education and development visions is the extent to which a focus on global goals can risk the downplaying of local contexts, and that this is ultimately self-defeating. Thus, our approach stresses that context matters (Crossley 2010) and we look particularly into a region that is characterised both by huge diversity and an almost total marginalisation from international policy debates: the Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

Whilst technical issues of appropriate pedagogies, learning technologies and teaching standards are important, we need to understand teachers' work and lives in order to understand the extent to which new initiatives are likely to have traction (Day and Gu 2010). Recent work, such as that of Buckler (2011 and 2015), locates this within a human development and capabilities framework that is sensitive to the individual lives, constraints and aspirations of teachers, and is particularly strong on cultural attitudes and their highly gendered nature. This focus on the deep context-groundedness of what it means to be a teacher resonates with work on the "ideal" Pacific teacher (Koya Vaka'uta 2012). However valuable such accounts are, they cannot fully explain the complex contexts in which such discussions take place. Such agentic processes of capabilities generation need to be explored in critical tension with insights stressing the importance of structural factors.

There is a large literature in developing country contexts that shows how new teacher education initiatives often fail due to their misarticulation with the realities of the schools, educational systems and societies in which teachers work and live (e.g, Saito, Tsukui and Tanaka 2008; Schweisfurth 2011). Moreover, in the Pacific Islands, educational reform has tended to neglect teachers, contributing to a disconnection between policies and implementation, undermining educational reform at the classroom level (Crossley and Vulliamy 1984; Thaman 2004, 2007 and 2008).

However these meso-level concerns with educational structures need to be considered alongside macro-level effects of uneven global development. Such effects include aid dominance (McGrath and Badroodien 2006; Cassity 2008; Ruru 2010); the effects of globalisation and postcoloniality (Thaman 2004; Crossley and Tikly 2004; Nabobo-Baba 2006a and 2008); and policy borrowing and uncritical transfer (Crossley and Watson 2003; McGrath 2010; Crossley and Watson 2011; Tuinamuana 2002 and 2007). Furthermore, given the specific

context of this study, it also necessary to be informed by a literature about the development opportunities and challenges of small island states, especially in the field of education (e.g., Crossley et al 2011; Crossley and Sprague 2014); and by work on the political economy of scale (e.g., Jessop 2002) and the creation of education “policy spaces” (e.g., Lawn and Lingard 2001).

Studying these issues in the PICs can offer new insights for a set of literatures that have tended to be concentrated on research in larger countries. Moreover, the sheer diversity of contexts within the region offers the possibility for a very wide range of data to be generated that can ensure a highly rich and complex account, particularly over multiple phases of research. Equally, this study will seek to address the silencing of Pacific voices in the international and comparative education debate.

Methodology

Data was collected from primary and secondary school teachers, teacher trainees and teacher educators. The teacher educators were selected from the three universities in Fiji, The University of Fiji, The Fiji National University and The University of the South Pacific. The teacher trainees were a cohort of in-service and pre-service students from each of the aforementioned universities. The pre-service teachers included students that had just come out of secondary schools or foundation studies at each of the universities mentioned. The in-service teachers were those that had been teaching for more than two years and were studying at the universities for upgrading. Most these in-service students had a teacher certificate from the teacher institutions in Fiji and were now at universities to gain a degree as an undergraduate.

Data was gathered through a mixed methods approach that combined aspects of Pacific Island and Western approaches to research. Questionnaires were developed jointly by the international research team and were given to teacher educators and teacher trainees. The USP team also conducted face-to-face data gathering using the popular talanoa method and the emergent talanga method. Talanoa is a contextually relevant cultural approach (generic to Polynesian societies and with equivalent concepts in other Melanesia and Micronesia) to dialogic methods of participant–researcher conversations that are preferred to interviews and or formalised focus group discussions (Nabobo-Baba 2006b; Fua 2009; ‘Otunuku 2011; Naisilisili 2012). Talanga on the other hand is an indigenous approach specific to Tonga and is premised on the notion of a stakeholder consultation based on consensus building (Finau et.al 2011). This emergent approach is used as a more structured contextual approach to dialogic method. These are seen as very congruent with the research approach of the England-based team members, particularly due to the strong emphasis on dialogue and the exploration of multiple perspectives. At the policy level, more formal elite interviews and documentary analysis were adopted, the latter through an approach influenced by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995 and 2005). The methodology is also informed by postcolonial perspectives on research (Smith 1999) and the possibilities and limitations of a Euro-Pacific mixed methods approach is itself an element of the study.

Looking forward

As was noted above, this paper is written before the data has been fully analysed and the approaches to both methodology and theory, thus, have not been adequately tested. Our next task is to finish coding the data before discussing our varied interpretations and agreeing on an overall account.

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Cross-cultural Educational Research Partnerships: Reflections on Pacific Experience and Collaboration

Michael Crossley (University of Bristol), Francis Koya Vaka'uta (The University of the South Pacific), Ledua Waqailiti (USP), Terra Sprague (University of Bristol) and Simon McGrath (University of Nottingham).

Introduction

The literature on international research partnerships has grown rapidly across many fields and disciplines in recent decades, with initial work emphasising the potential and benefits to be gained from such developments. Within this literature, much attention has also been given to North-South research collaboration, with increasing numbers of accounts presenting detailed case studies of successful initiatives. To date, however, few studies have focussed explicitly upon the process of collaboration in ways that have generated critical reflection, and have improved our collective understanding of the dilemmas encountered in sustaining cross-cultural research partnerships. This paper explores the origins, strengths and limitations of one North-South research partnership, relating to teacher education in Fiji, in which we have been involved. The analysis draws upon the related international literature, interrogates the partnership experience from a diversity of cultural and professional perspectives, and explores ways of generating more context sensitive and sustainable research partnerships for future educational and social research within and beyond the Pacific.

Research Partnerships for International Development

Much has been written on the broad theme of international partnerships in the development literature, with many writers advocating partnership models and collaborative strategies for educational and social development (King, 1990; Gmelin et al., 2001; Chisholm and Steiner-Khamsi, 2009). Such thinking has, in turn, played a part in influencing debates concerning cross-cultural educational research, the nature of North-South and South-South research collaboration, and related implications for research capacity building (Gibbons et al., 1994; KFPE, 1998). Research funders, for example, increasingly support international collaborations, as Stephens's (2009) edited, and multidisciplinary, volume of case studies of British Council funded projects demonstrates. Within such work it is argued that this can do much to strengthen local relevance and context sensitivity, and improve the impact of research upon policy and practice – at the same time as enhancing research capacity in both the North and the South (DFID, 2005, 2008).

While this advocacy literature continues to grow, and its influence is increasingly visible, few studies have interrogated the detailed practical experiences of cross-cultural educational research partnerships. This is especially so for those with a North-South dimension, and even less has been done in the small states context. Some work carried out by our own team members has, nevertheless, made a contribution, although this has drawn largely upon Africa-UK experience. Barrett and colleagues (2011, 2014), for example, contrast the perspectives and views of African and UK partners involved in collaborative research on the quality of education in East and West Africa, and upon a joint initiative for research training at the University of Buea in Cameroon. In doing so they identify significant issues relating to equity in the distribution of research leadership and rewards; to the dilemmas faced in meeting fixed deadlines; to challenges relating to space, resources and time; and to related discourse and ethical challenges and

implications. This is a useful starting point so we will return to this experience later within the context of our own Pacific analysis.

With regard to the literature of education in small states, writers such as Crossley and Holmes (2001) and Louisy (2001, 2004) go on to argue that the strengthening of educational research capacity is especially important in such contexts where the influence of external personnel, agencies and research findings has often been insufficiently grounded in local needs and priorities. Within the Caribbean, Holmes and Crossley (2004:207) thus note how contemporary postcolonial theory has helped to reveal how 'much academic and policy research still has a strong western and positivistic orientation'. This helps to explain why some Caribbean researchers have been 'stretching the boundaries of research to include more informal, but nevertheless intellectual, activities such as work of the storyteller and Calypsonian' to enable local insights, values and cultural perspectives to influence both research findings and related policy formulations. Within the South Pacific the work of Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Thaman (2000; 2006; 2014) and Koya Vaka'uta (2015) has articulated a similar and strong case for the strengthening the place of Pacific values, cultures and ethics in both educational development and educational research. It is in this spirit and tradition that the present collaborative study was developed as a joint initiative between The University of the South Pacific (USP), the University of Bristol and the University of Nottingham. The details of this partnership are outlined below.

The USP/Bristol/Nottingham Teacher Education Research Partnership: 2014-2016

The project built upon long term personal contacts and friendships, and developed as part of the appointment of Michael Crossley as an Adjunct Professor of Education at USP from 2012. Initial discussions with School of Education colleagues at USP indicated that the strengthening of teacher education was a contemporary priority throughout the 12 nations of the region served by the University. This is evidenced in national and regional reports such as Fiji Education Commission Report (2000), Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP, 2001) and Pacific Education Development Framework (2009 – 2015). To cite the Fiji National Curriculum Framework (2013) 'Teacher preparedness is critical to the effective implementation and on-going monitoring, assessment, evaluation and continuous improvement of curriculum development and delivery. This highlights the significance of teacher training and education as well as periodic professional development opportunities' (p.6). Given the central place of the USP School of Education in providing high quality teacher education throughout the region research into teacher education is, appropriately, one of its own current priorities. This was highlighted in a 2010 Departmental Review (USP, 2010), and can be seen in the contributions made by School of Education personnel to a new edited volume that identifies current educational challenges issues and priorities across the South Pacific (Crossley, Hancock and Sprague, 2015).

In the same volume, Johansson – Fua (2015), the Director of the USP Institute of Education, points out how improving the quality of teacher education lies at the heart of efforts to improve the quality of education for all; and Sharma and colleagues (2015: 253) demonstrate how in Fiji 'The dramatic increase in student population of the urban schools has not only yielded student and staff diversity, but also increased the demand for appropriately qualified teachers', and for more systematic programmes for continuing professional development. More positively, there is also much evidence of Pacific teacher education leading innovative work on education for sustainable development (Koya Vaka'uta et al. 2010), and in pioneering advances in distance and open learning (Lingham et al., 2015).

Reflecting the broader literature on education in small states, (Crossley et al., 2011) it can be argued that, because these systems were some of the first to prioritise qualitative improvements in education, there is much that the wider international community can learn from their distinctive experience. Similarly, we hope that critical reflections upon our own collaborative research on Pacific teacher education, as presented here, will make a helpful contribution to both the literature on education in small states, and to the broader international literature on cross-cultural research partnerships and capacity building.

In planning the study a level of Pacific-wide scope and impact was envisaged, although an initial phase of fieldwork focussed upon teacher education in Fiji was seen to be more realistic and achievable at the outset. This, it was agreed, would provide a vehicle for team-building, for detailed and collective research design, and for the development of research protocols, instruments and working practices. From the outset, the application of a shared on-line platform was identified as a priority for team building and communication, as a way of sharing material and as a joint working and writing space. This was envisaged as an addition to regular email and Skype communication – and the research proposal itself incorporated a sequence of international workshops, with Pacific team members visiting the UK, and UK members visiting USP at key project milestones. These were scheduled for the start of the 18 month project cycle, during mid-term and at project conclusion.

To maximise the potential of workshop visits the first team meeting was scheduled to coincide with a major international conference held at the University of Bristol on the theme of Living at the Sharp End of Environmental Uncertainty in Small Island States (see <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cabot/research/casestudies/2014/57.html>). The project lead in Fiji was invited to participate in this conference, and the programme itself was designed to help explore the implications of work on sustainable development and climate change for the future of teacher education in the Pacific. To enhance research impact a project conclusion conference has been planned to be held in collaboration with the Fiji Ministry of Education in Suva during 2016.

Funding for the project was awarded by the British Academy, with matching finance from The University of the South Pacific, and additional support from the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education (FALE) at USP. The two project bids that secured the funding were prepared collaboratively by the core team members in the UK and the Pacific. The UK partners provided leadership in terms of locating the study within the related international literature, while the Pacific partners led in the development of fieldwork plans and conduct. The latter included the incorporation of representative from the Fiji Ministry of Education within the team, research assistants from the two other national universities, namely the Fiji National University (FNU) and the University of Fiji (UniFiji), and the identification and engagement of local Research Assistants (RAs) to help with fieldwork and the analysis of findings. Most pertinently for the present article, one of the three project research questions was purposefully developed to capture critical reflections on the cross-cultural research partnership in practice as below:

To what extent is it possible to construct postcolonial research collaboration that balances capacity development, mutual learning and quality research outputs? This will involve critical reflection upon all elements of the research partnership process leading to methodological and theoretical contributions to the international literature (Project Proposal page 6).

Reflections upon the Research Partnership

In this section we reflect upon the experience of this cross-cultural research partnership in the light of experience to date. The UKFIET Conference will provide an important opportunity for the team to come together to identify and discuss other issues, benefits and challenges, and that, combined with the broader Symposium discussions will help to inform and extend these final two sections of analysis further.

Firstly, however, the Fijian team members in particular feel that the project provides a collaborative learning opportunity for researchers to garner new knowledge about working across the operational cultural contexts within which each institution and scholar primarily engages. At USP, for example, the partnership has enabled mid-career academics to draw from a wide and varied knowledge and experiential base of seasoned scholars with a shared research interest in quality teachers and teaching.

The partnership presents multiple benefits including value-added educational research for USP as an institution. This has also strengthened research relationships between the Schools of Education at USP and the two national universities in Fiji, the Fiji National University and the University of Fiji. The potential for strengthening further research networks through various communities of practice in Fiji and potentially in the 12 member countries of the USP region is recognized as a potentially significant outcome of the undertaking.

In line with the current USP Strategic Plan (USP, 2013 – 2018) which highlights the mission to achieve excellence in teaching and research, this partnership provides a space within which to consider differentials and synergies in education, teacher quality and teaching discourses at the local, Pacific and international/UK levels.

Such an undertaking is not without challenge and some of the emergent issues include limited institutional capacity to provide support due to resource and staffing constraints. For instance, personnel changes and transitional leadership within the USP School of Education resulted in shared leadership responsibilities which impacted heavily on the USP researchers' workloads. Additionally, on-going tensions between the business of teaching and the research priority pose a continual threat to the timely and effective completion of all activities.

Other tensions include managing a diverse team distanced by space and limited by personal and institutional expectations and negotiating different university and Ministry systems in Fiji and the UK. Issues of connectivity and large time difference have also posed a challenge to regular Skype discussions and the primary means of communication has relied heavily on email. Additionally, it has been difficult to identify and use an appropriate online platform to share resources and data. Cross-cultural differences in views on time are an added tension which the team continues to work through. A particularly difficult issue is the cost of international travel between the UK and Fiji. For example, initial plans for the two USP researchers to travel to the UK for this symposium proved to be too costly, resulting in the decision for one researcher to make the journey. Accessing recent international literature has also been difficult from USP, in particular gaining access to Pacific and international publications in print media. While numerous electronic versions of journal articles are available, books and book chapters are less accessible.

Finally at the national level in the Fiji Islands, the education system is currently going through a period of rapid educational reform and this in itself has had an impact on the study. Thus, while the pre-2014 election Ministry of Education had expressed full support and encouraged close engagement in the project, the new Government line up of Ministry of Education staff are now, understandably,

caught up in the business of change management and curriculum reform with less time available than their predecessors.

Sustainable Futures for Pacific Research Partnerships

In this final and concluding section we reflect upon the Pacific – UK research partnership, in the light of the related international literature, to explore ways of strengthening future cross-cultural research partnerships in education and the wider social sciences. While much has been achieved this has not been an easy project for all involved. On the other hand, the challenges experienced have helped greatly in revealing the realities of North – South collaboration in ways that we believe can help to inform improvements for others engaged in such cross cultural work....and to shape improvements that may lead to more successful and sustainable cross cultural research futures.

Firstly our experience suggests that there is much to be learned from such collaborative work but that face to face time is more important than is often recognised. The team is of the view that such research partnerships can work best with shared commitment and this is vital from the outset. Ensuring more efficient and timely completion of deliverables means greater pre-planning in negotiating workloads, in this case particularly for the Fiji Team to allocate realistic numbers of personnel for fieldwork research activity. At key times our experience also suggests that dedicated research leave may be essential for such work in the current professional culture at USP where large and ongoing teaching loads are carried by academics in the School of Education, including all research team members. The establishment of secure and reliable internet services and of a workable and compatible on-line platform for sharing material and developments are essential tools that are not always easy to establish. And at USP major problems have been repeatedly encountered throughout the project. With advances in technology and related staff skills we would, however, anticipate that this will greatly strengthen such initiatives in the future. This section and its implications will also be further developed during UKFIET discussions and in the course of completing the project itself.

In concluding for now, we hope that the experience gained through this USP, Bristol and Nottingham research partnership will be helpful for others working in education and other sectors within the Pacific region, and for those engaged in similar initiatives elsewhere. It is a special opportunity to work together across the globe in ways like this, an opportunity that we have all learned much from, and one that we all, as a team, value greatly.

Acknowledgements

This paper reports on ongoing research funded by the British Academy and The University of the South Pacific. Thanks are extended to Professor Rajesh Chandra, Vice-Chancellor at USP, for his strong support from the outset and Professor Konai Helu Thaman, UNESCO Chair and Professor in Teacher Education and Culture, USP. The full team membership consists of Dr. Frances Koya Vaka'uta and Dr. Ledua Waqailiti (The University of the South Pacific), Professor Michael Crossley and Terra Sprague (University of Bristol) and Professor Simon McGrath (University of Nottingham).

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