

RELATIONSHIPS, STATUS, AND TRADITIONS:  
SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY IN A FIJIAN VILLAGE

by

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## **Abstract**

This two year ethnographic study was conducted in Fiji in a traditional hierarchical community with a largely subsistence economy. I set out to study the complex relations that exist between a school and its community, and specifically to determine (a) the factors that motivate or inhibit community members in their support of the local school and (b) how the various interests of parents, educators, community members, and international agencies are communicated and negotiated. Many existing studies of the connections between schools and communities in developing countries pay too little attention to the community's interests. In this study I drew on existing theories of community participation in education to develop a broad-based, multi-faceted framework that guided data collection.

My data demonstrate that in traditional, hierarchical societies, families' decisions about supporting formal education for one individual are made within a communal framework that also values activities that strengthen relationships, enhance status, and preserve traditions. Families preferred academic education in English over vocational training because of the increased status these programs provided to the student. While there was little support for programs to maintain local culture and language, the community did not support schooling that eroded the traditions of the community. These factors help to account for the presence of both support and resistance towards programs of economic and social development.

This study found that Western models of parental participation or community involvement for the purposes of improving student achievement, increasing community funding, or enhancing the accountability of education systems do not necessarily apply to other cultures. Educators must understand the patterns of relationships, status, and traditions that exist within a community in order to successfully communicate educational goals and negotiate the interests of all groups.

Relationships, status, and traditions within which school-community relations exist in developing countries are complex, dynamic, and powerful. For educators at the local, national, and international levels to succeed, they must develop strategies for identifying, comprehending, and working within these often powerful forces.

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## Glossary of Fijian Words<sup>1</sup>

<i>Bauan</i>	the national Fijian dialect.
<i>bure</i>	a home, either traditional or modern construction.
<i>kava</i>	a Polynesian word for a social drink made by squeezing a mixture of the grated root of the pepper shrub ( <i>piper methysticum</i> ) and cold water through a cloth.
<i>kerekere</i>	request.
<i>lovo</i>	earthen oven
<i>mataqali</i>	patrilineal social unit made up of several extended families ( <i>tokatoka</i> ). It is the recognized land-owning and fishing rights group.
<i>meke</i>	a dance
<i>solu</i>	a collection of money and goods for a cause.
<i>tabu</i>	a prohibition
<i>Tai</i>	title of respect given to men and women. (Totoka dialect)
<i>tokatoka</i>	extended family social unit. Several <i>tokatoka</i> make up a <i>mataqali</i> .
<i>Turaga ni Koro</i>	literally "chief of the village," but this is a government administrative position rather than a chiefly position. In Totoka, the <i>Turaga ni Koro</i> was chosen by the male elders of the community and also had the role of the chief's spokesman.
<i>vakatunaloa</i>	a temporary shelter to shade a group of people from the sun.
<i>vanua</i>	land, people, and the custom. Also a larger social unit made up of several <i>mataqali</i> , under a chief who sits on the Great Council of Chiefs.
<i>yagona</i>	the Fijian word for <i>kava</i> .

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled from the glossaries in Ravuvu (1988) and Nayacakalou (1978) as well as *A New Fijian Dictionary* by Capell (1991).

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Journal entry, April 26, 2000, Totoka Island<sup>2</sup>, Fiji*

*The entire island is full of activity and excitement about the rugby and netball tournaments this weekend. This will be the big fund-raiser for the school this year. Teams started coming in today from as far away as the town of Sigatoka. The chairman of the school committee is very busy getting everything organized. The boys have all gone to the school to get things ready. The girls' netball teams are busy getting their uniforms together. The rugby teams are training and practising. Late afternoon the boats came back from the city of Lautoka with supplies. We got a ride over to the school on one of the boats. There are temporary shelters up around the school compound. Big pots of rice and dahl are being cooked.*

*Journal entry, April 27, 2000*

*The day started very early as everyone went over to one of the teacher's houses to cut and butter the bread. Then we set up another tent, decorated the pavilion by the school and then teams started showing up. I felt pretty useless even though I kept asking what I could do. (Perhaps I am pretty useless in this culture.) Finally, I started doing the dishes as people finished the tea and bread for breakfast. Teams were all over, in different corners of the school compound, warming up and trying on their uniforms. The netball teams especially have been very excited about getting their uniforms together. The school generator was started early this morning so the local Y2K team could iron their logos on their shirts. It was all worth it: they won the best-dressed-team prize. There are 24 rugby teams and 11 netball teams. The games started after 9 AM - after an opening ceremony - and continued all day. Sitiveni<sup>3</sup>, a young man on the school committee, set up under the tent and collected the team fees. All over the school compound, people from the island are raising money for the school by selling tea, BBQ, juice, cigarettes, and snacks.*

*Journal entry, April 28, 2000*

*Second day of the tournament. Etika and his friend are drawing up the schedule after the elimination round yesterday. Anare took time to explain it to us. He says he has organized several tournaments but has shown the boys how to do it since he is getting old. I asked how he learned. He said by playing in tournaments, but I questioned how he could learn organization on the field. He said he looked in the paper to see how the Fiji 7's are organized. Anare said that originally the elders didn't support the tournament but now they do. Some villagers weren't helping*

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<sup>2</sup> "Totoka Island" is a pseudonym used to protect the confidentiality of the people in the study.

<sup>3</sup> All the names of the people of Totoka are pseudonyms.

*but yesterday, when they saw it happening they came over. Anare would like to see the tournament expand to 30 - 48 teams. Anare kept saying how it is good for the school.*

*Late in the afternoon, there was great excitement as everyone ran down to the beach to greet the "special guests" who we discovered were the national recording star, Sekope and his band. After the tournament, everyone went back to the villages or relaxed under the coconut trees while the school committee set up the stage for the performance. The fenced in area was soon full of people of all ages enjoying the concert. The old women especially seemed to be enjoy it, some of them getting up on stage to dance with Sekope. The Head Teacher asked if I noticed the children. She said that this is the first concert like this that they've heard, the first opportunity to see what a musician does. Some kids aren't good at school, she said, but are good singers. I finally found a job writing receipts which led to counting and hiding the money. The concert is over now because the generator ran out of diesel, but Sekope and some local men are still singing just outside my bedroom window.*

Educators might be pleased to see the community involvement in this school fundraising event. Community developers might extol the benefits of sporting events in developing community pride and educating community members in organizational skills. But how did this joint school-community event come to be? Why were the villagers willing to feed and house rugby teams for three days? Who decided how to spend the money raised?

Both the fields of education and international development recognize the importance of relations between school and community. There is very little information, however, on what these relations look like in developing countries and what factors influence them. The purpose of this research is to contribute to a more thorough understanding of the complex connections between a community and its school. This study answers the following questions:

1. What are the factors that motivate or inhibit community members in their support of the local school?

2. How are the various interests of parents, educators, community members and international agencies communicated and negotiated?

What is learned from this case study provides valuable information regarding community-school relations in other communities around the world. While each community is different, and therefore interactions between each community and school will be different, what is learned from one community can help to raise questions and lead to answers in other communities that may share similar characteristics.

### **Connections Between School and Community**

Education is often portrayed in education and international development literature as something that is ‘delivered’ to the people in local communities for the economic and social development of a country; what is often not considered is how the community members themselves view education and how they relate to the school in their community. The literature tends to portray parents and community members as not having the skills, experience, or the “correct” attitudes to be involved in education. Many of the resulting programs focus on convincing parents of the importance of education and the importance of their role in their child’s education. For example, as part of UNESCO’s Basic Education and Literacy Support, the Community and Parent Support Program encourages teachers to hold parent meetings where teachers attempt to improve parents’ attitudes towards helping their children in school activities and to teach them skills such as making books to read at home. This is a simplistic view of relations between school and community that does not recognize the complex factors that influence the educational decisions made by parents and communities.

Recently education policies adopted by developing countries and international agencies have moved from ignoring the connection between school and community to recommending community involvement as a way to solve problems in the education system (UNESCO, 1997; World Bank, 1995). In the development literature that does discuss the school-community connection, the discussion is often limited to the community's financial contribution to education. The complexity of the interactions between the school and the community is rarely considered.

Some development agencies such as the World Bank (1995) recognize the possible benefits of positive community-school connections, specifically recommending increased community participation in education. However, before community involvement can be increased, there is a need for more information about the factors that strengthen or weaken community-school relations. A greater understanding of these relations is necessary as educators, departments of education, and international organizations begin to set policies regarding community involvement in education and the school's role in community development.

It is even difficult to choose a word that signifies the complex interactions between school and community. The words "association" and "affiliation" imply a formalized connection between institutions, such as a parent-teacher association (PTA). Many words, such as "involvement" (Epstein, 1992) and "participation" (Arnstein, 1969; Shaeffer, 1994; Uemara, 1999), focus on how the community can be involved in education and participate in school activities, neglecting educators' responsibilities. "Participation" is sometimes limited to access issues, referring to enrollment and attendance of children in school (Kochhar & Gopal, 1997). Tavola (1999) uses the word



“co-operation” to refer specifically to the shared responsibilities of community and state in financing and managing schools in Fiji. Originally, I had chosen the word “relationship” to signify the reciprocal nature of the various interactions between community members and educators, but this became problematic as I learned the importance of social and economic relationships in Fijian society. To avoid confusion, I will use the words “relations” (Williams, 1997), “connections” and “interactions” to describe the links between community and educators.

My research into community-school interactions in a Fijian community contributes to filling a problematic gap in the existing literature. Case studies in the development literature provide examples of reforms attempting to provide relevant curriculum and first language instruction (see for example, Haddad & Demsky, 1994; Maheshwari, 1998). Many educational reforms in developing countries fail because they do not “meaningfully integrate community needs” (Schofield, 2003, p. 206). A discussion of the community’s interests in the area of the educational reform and the community’s role in the implementation of reforms is often missing in the literature describing these reforms.

It is possible that the interactions between a community and a school may not be positive, for example when the politics within the community disrupt the operation of the school. Nevertheless, every school has to relate in some way to the community from which the students come to school. It is important to understand what factors affect the interactions in order to attempt to ensure relations between the school and the community that are supportive of multiple interests.

## **A Broad View of Community-School Interactions**

Most discussions of the role of the community in education consider only one aspect of the interactions. The focus may be on parent involvement, the inclusion of local culture in the curriculum, or the community's contribution to the financing of education. These one-dimensional views miss the complexity of community-school relations.

This study uses a comprehensive view of community-school interactions derived from Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation of local people in development projects and Epstein's (1992) types of parent involvement in education in North America. The resulting model comprises five non-hierarchical, reciprocal categories, each important to the relations between school and community: attitude, communication, involvement, governance, and collaboration.

Below is a short description of each of these categories. A complete description of each category is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3 describing my research methods.

- **Attitude.** This refers to community members' attitudes towards school and formal learning as well as school personnel's attitude toward the community's values and traditions.
- **Communication.** Information from the school to the community of school activities, goals, and reform initiatives is considered as well as communication to the school personnel of community activities and goals.

- **Involvement.** This includes parent and community participation in school activities, including attending performances, helping in classrooms, and contributing resources, material, and labour. Also included is school involvement in community affairs including service projects, cultural events, and adult education.
- **Governance.** Community members' participation in educational decision-making, including financial decisions, is considered as well as school personnel's participation in decision-making regarding community activities, particularly community development.
- **Collaboration.** This category looks at ways that the school and the community work together on goals of community development and increased student achievement.

My definition of who is involved in these interactions is broad. While many studies look only at parent involvement in schooling, I have included other family members who may be involved in a student's life and also other community members, especially leaders, who may be influential in educational decisions in the community. On the school side of the connection are the educators, the teachers and administrators who interact directly with community members and also researchers and personnel in national ministries and international agencies who have a variety of interests in education and whose decisions affect the local interactions.

## **Overview of Research Methods - An Ethnographic Case Study**

A two-year ethnographic case study of a Fijian community allowed for an in-depth investigation into the complex interactions between school and community. The ethnographic methods of observation and interviewing provided the opportunity to investigate the attitudes and interests of the local people as well as their interactions with the school and educators. Chapter 3 contains a full description of my research methods.

The Republic of the Fiji Islands provided a suitable context for the study as it was designated as a developing country by international organizations and therefore subject to the development theories relevant to this study. As well, Fiji's education system was largely composed of schools managed by local committees, thereby providing a context for the study that included a formalized connection between community and school. A general overview of the country with a more in-depth look at its education system is contained in Chapter 4.

With the assistance of the University of the South Pacific (USP), I met the teachers and community members on Totoka Island, an outer island with approximately 400 community members living a subsistence lifestyle. Beside one of the island's three villages, there was a primary school with four teachers, managed by a community school committee. There was also a locally owned and managed back-packers resort where a few community members had wage jobs with a regular salary. I received permission from the Head Teacher, the School Committee, and the village elders to move to Totoka and conduct my research. The community of Totoka is described in Chapter 4.

From October 1999 until May 2001, my husband and I lived with several families on the island. Initially, I collected data through observations of daily events at the school and

in the community as well as through informal interviews with teachers and community members. Formal interviews were conducted near the end of the study and, finally, preliminary findings were presented at village meetings, where community members could make comments, confirming, amending and adding to these findings.

I chose as the topic of my research, not to understand another culture, but to study where cultures meet, in community-school interaction. This is not a socio-economic study of Fijian society or even of this one community. While the economics of the community and the Fijian culture are important aspects of the context within which this study took place, the focus is on the school-community connection and therefore on education in one community in Fiji.

This study focusses on schooling as opposed to informal education such as adult education programs or the non-formal education that takes place as part of everyday life. This study is also limited to primary and secondary schooling since that is the focus of the research on community-school relations, particularly in developing countries and all that is relevant in this context. It does not examine curriculum or pedagogy, especially interactions between teachers and students within the school. Additionally, early childhood education and post-secondary education are only referred to in so far as they may be part of a person's educational life or mentioned by community members as a part of the total education system.

Because of my position as a foreigner, I chose not to include students in my interviews as the difficulties of interviewing children are increased across languages and cultures. While children continually cross the boundary between school and community,

constantly negotiating the differences, decisions about the interactions are usually made by adults and therefore adults are the focus of this study.

### **The Foreigner as Researcher**

Because of the importance of the ethical conduct of research in a cross-cultural context, I have included here a summary of how my position as a foreigner in the community influenced the design and implementation of the study. Included in Chapter 3 is a full discussion of my position as a foreign researcher and how I chose my research methods in light of the ethics of the situation.

I was aware of the ethics of entering a research site in a developing country as a particularly privileged foreigner. Therefore, I first received the approval and support of the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji as well as the Fiji Island Ministry for Education and Technology for my research. Since there are no formal guidelines for research in Fiji I relied on published research guidelines from other indigenous communities (Grenier, 1998; Mamak & McCall, 1978) and recommendations from indigenous researchers (Battiste, 1998, Smith, 1999) in more developed contexts. Influenced by recommendations for ethical research as well as ethnographic methods, I chose to live in a community for an extended period of time. This gave me the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the local context and gave the members of the community the opportunity to get to know me - a crucial aspect of relationships in a traditional community.

I entered the community as an outsider and as a learner from another culture. While living in the community for an extended period helped me understand my research topic,

there are concepts that I truly cannot understand because of my predominantly North American and caucasian worldview or ontology. Anthropological ethnography is caught in this tension between the belief in the characteristics of a universal humanity that allow individuals to experience - even be assimilated into - another culture and a belief in fundamental differences between cultures' ontologies (Bowman, 1997, p. 43).

A long-term ethnography helped with the problems of ontology, allowing me to enter into relationships with research participants and local researchers so that in many instances they were able to try to explain Fijian behaviours to me. Being in the field for two years did not let me achieve complete understanding, but helped me recognize the limits of my understanding and the limits of my study. I found myself often confused as to individuals' seemingly irrational behaviour. For example, I would often have to purchase fuel and hire a boat in order to get to the mainland for a meeting. No matter how long I planned in advance and regardless of my willingness to pay in advance, I was sometimes unable to get a ride on a boat even though there were boats available and even travelling where I needed to go. In some instances, I learned that the boat had been needed to go fishing or the fuel was already promised to a family member, but often I was confused and frustrated at not being able to ensure a boat ride. I could intellectually understand that the Fijians' actions were often influenced by the importance of relationships over money or convenience, but emotionally it was difficult to accept. A longer time in the culture gave me a better understanding of how things worked, but not a full comprehension or internalization of the processes.

## **Community-School Relations in Theory**

My analysis of the research data revealed that current education theories regarding community-school relations do not accurately predict decisions and actions at the local level. Two theories in particular that conflicted with real life in the village were (a) education is an important part of economic and social development and (b) increased community involvement improves school effectiveness and efficiency. National ministries and international agencies use these educational theories to develop policies on educational curriculum, funding, and governance, policies that affect the interactions between the local school and the community that it serves. These theories are introduced below and are more fully explained in Chapter 2.

International development agencies, such as the World Bank and UNICEF, as well as various government ministries link education with the economic development of a community. For example, a World Bank review presents “educational reform as an important component of economic reform programs” (World Bank, 1995, p.154). These economic reforms change over time and the purpose of education is seen to change as a result. The case studies presented by Haddad and Demsky (1994) illustrate the changes over several decades as the thrust moved from providing an academic education aimed at providing a suitable labour force to a focus on vocational/agricultural education that would encourage rural populations to remain in villages.

Reformers also use education as a means for social development. Educators and community leaders, such as Thaman (1993) in Fiji and First Nations leaders in North America (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996), often refer to the role that education can play in maintaining local culture and language. Health agencies,



environmental organizations, and human rights advocates all call on the education system to include curricula to address their particular issues and also enhance the quality of life in a community.

A second educational theory is that the involvement of the community in education can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the education system. The effectiveness of a school is often measured by the achievement of students in the school. Educational research, particularly in multicultural education and First Nations education in North America, shows that a variety of community involvement initiatives in education can contribute to improved student academic achievement. Educators such as Epstein (1992) have found that parent involvement in school activities has a beneficial effect. First Nations leaders (Assembly of First Nations, 1988) and educators (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992) stress the importance of involving the community in governance. Of particular concern to many Canadian First Nations is local control over curriculum to reflect the local culture and language, creating a close link between the community and the school.

Development agencies, government ministries of education, and educators also look to community involvement in the school system to improve efficiency through increased support for education, including local funding, as well as improved accountability. A World Bank review, *Priorities and Strategies for Education*, states that community participation in management will increase local willingness to fund education as well as make the school system more accountable for both the spending of educational funds and providing quality education (1995, p.120).

## **Overview of the Study**

This research studies the local level where the policies of national and international agencies encounter the interests of the local people. By studying the local situation, asking how educators and community members work together, my research examines how closely these theories do or do not correspond to the actual local interactions.

The theory that education is necessary for economic and social development is the core of education policies in developing countries. This theory is so well-established that when there are educational problems such as low enrollment or low achievement the problem is assumed to be that parents do not understand the importance of education for the economic and social development of their children, their community and their country. In Chapter 5, I argue that it is not the poor attitudes of parents towards education that causes them to allow their children to drop out of secondary school. Instead my analysis leads to an understanding of the education of the individual as only a part of the economic security of the family unit. Relationships, status, and traditions are as important to economic security as the benefits provided by education. Similarly, the social structure of the community depends on relationships, status, and traditions; therefore, education which preserves language and culture, while giving children the status gained from learning English and succeeding in Western culture, was supported. Community members do not unquestioningly accept the social development that education offers, especially those changes that threaten the structure of their society.

In Chapter 6, I argue that relationships, status, and traditions also affected the extent and manner of involvement as much as any expectation that involvement would positively affect the educational achievement of the children. Due to the hierarchical

nature of the traditional Fijian society and the importance of status, parent involvement is very different in Totoka than in Western countries. Rather than having an equal partnership between teachers and parents, teachers are given a greater role in the education of the children because of the higher status of teachers and their recognized expertise in the Western language and culture. Community members generally contributed money or labour to the school because of their relationship to the head teacher or the chair of the school committee. Large donations were given to the school in order to maintain the status of the family in the eyes of the community. Involvement often required that traditional hierarchical roles were recognized for communication and decision-making purposes.

National and international education statements (Ministry of Education, 2000; World Bank, 1995) reflect the theory that community involvement will increase the support and funding of schooling as well as the accountability for the management of these funds. In the village of Totoka, local leadership and internal politics played a greater role in school funding than individuals' involvement in the school. My analysis shows that rather than developing an increased Western sense of accountability for funds, the community sense of appropriate spending of money was based more on traditions, status, and relationships.

Members of the community in this study, while believing in the benefits of education, made educational decisions within the broader context of their lives. There were other demands on their time, attention and resources. Sometimes the local people saw the benefits of a competing demand as greater than the benefit to be accrued from education. The decisions that they made regarding the survival and prosperity of their family and community sometimes favoured education, but also took into account

economics, status, relationships, and traditions. This study found that community-school relations exist within, and cannot be separated from, a larger community dynamic and extant social and cultural traditions.

Educators would like to believe that education should always be given the highest priority. Many education theories reflect that bias. But the daily reality of peoples' lives requires that they make decisions on how they will allocate their sometimes meagre resources. Will the money go towards paying school fees or buying new tin for the roof of the house? Will they attend the school meeting or go to the Bible Study? Will they listen to the head of the family or the Head Teacher?

Educators must realize that community members make decisions while considering factors other than just educational needs and that sometimes other interests are given priority over education. While this affects community-school relations, it does not mean that the community does not support education or that the school does not play an important role in community development. In Chapter 7, I conclude by looking at the implications for educators in deciding whether they will compete for the community's resources or whether they can work with community members, recognizing that status, relationships, and traditions can, at times, be as important as education.

I turn now to examine the literature about relations between school and community in developing countries.

## 2. LITERATURE

A case study of educational reform in Burkina Faso (Haddad & Demsky, 1994) was instrumental in my search for understanding the interactions between the local community and educators in developing countries. In the 1960's, Burkina Faso, a largely agricultural-based African country, decided to provide an affordable, more relevant education and totally restructured its formal educational system to focus on a three-year program of courses in literacy, numeracy, and agricultural training and production. The goal was to provide an education that prepared students for the employment that was available to them in the community, thus providing for the individual as well as the total community. These reforms were influenced by international economists and educators and seemed to be a practical application of the theories from multicultural and First Nations education that urged that education be relevant to the local community. Yet, after a decade of implementing the changes, the national ministry of education in Burkina Faso evaluated the program and found that the programs were expensive, achievement levels were low, and local communities were not sending their children to the schools. They concluded that the reforms did not meet the needs of the students, their communities, or the country. However, instead of being dropped, the focus on rural education was intensified due to the priorities for funding set by the World Bank. The case study described many external influences on the education system in the community: educators, economists, and developers in national and international development agencies. But there was a glaring lack of any involvement by community members themselves in the reforms. Their dissatisfaction with the school system was in evidence only through their refusal to send their children to the school. What were the relations between the

community members and the school personnel that parents were not able to voice their concerns or were not heeded?

In this chapter, I first look at how relations between community and school are presented in the international development literature. Then I review the literature for mention of the specific interests of the educators and community developers and how those interests are communicated to community members. Finally, I look for indications in the literature of what factors affect community members' interactions with schools.

### **Views of School and Community**

In 1995, McGinn and Borden, looking at research in developing countries, wrote that

Educators often emphasize the importance of good relationships between school and community. We found no studies on this topic other than that reported below.  
(74)

They went on to describe a study that interviewed principals in Sri Lanka and reported cash, labour, and material contributions from the community.

In 1997, Reimers also found a lack of theory in the area of decentralization/school autonomy/community participation.

A theory explaining how decentralization of these functions would lead to improved pedagogical practice and eventually to greater learning is missing in much of the current debate on school autonomy/participation....A theory about the role of community participation in educational quality should address the factors that influence the demand and supply of education and how greater community linkages would affect these factors. (148)

Reimers goes on to propose a model of conditions facilitating educational opportunity and the role of the community in supporting them. His model uses Shaeffer's seven

degrees of participation which I have also used in my model for data collection that I describe in Chapter 3.

Reimers proposes using his model as “a strategy to increase the competencies of local communities” and to look for sources of resistance to participation (1997, pp. 151-152), treating the community as a lesser partner in education. This view of the community’s role in education in developing countries was common in early development literature. In their 1978 chapter on participation, Havelock and Huberman focus on collaboration between institutions, with a small section devoted to community. In their one example of good participation in a road-building project in the Philippines they declare:

We decided to match the privileges that they asked for with the corresponding responsibilities which we believed it was in their own interest to accept and do something about. (213)

Knowing what was best for the participants was common in development projects in the 1970’s.

By the 1990’s, participation had become a popular theme in development, often in an attempt to legitimize the tight control that an organization continues to hold over policy as well as money (Lynch, 1997, p.67). Some education projects did consider community participation as more than a convenient trend. Reporting on the failure of relevant education programs in Tanzania, LeBlanc found that projects that were too centralized often failed whereas decentralization to local communities required changes at the delivery end. Decentralization provided the advantages of opportunities for local input, increased dissemination of information, and recognition of ideological differences between clients and policy-makers (1990, p.141).

A case study in the United Republic of Cameroon uses a broad understanding, similar to mine, to describe the cooperation between a school and a community (Bude in Hawes & Stephens, 1990, pp.131-34). Bude included information on the parent-teacher association, use of community members for instruction, use of school facilities, school assistance in community projects, community participation in fund-raising, curriculum, and including local culture. Bude concludes that "community orientation of schooling is no substitute for macro-social and-economic reform" (p.133). Other than this sweeping statement, Hawes and Stephens do not report any discussion of the factors influencing the relationship. This leads to the question of what were the factors that influenced how the community and the school interacted and related to each other.

In Montero-Sieburth's (1992) article, "Models and Practice of Curriculum Change in Developing Countries," there is a focus on teacher training and practice rather than on the community, but this review of literature stresses the importance of the local context and the important role of the "active and reflective participation" of the community.

Curricular changes are unlikely to succeed unless there are social and academic activities in which parents are encouraged to participate. The development of agricultural units or the training of parents to read with their children and pay attention to their homework are examples of such activities....Such changes, however, have a reciprocal dimension. The onus for change lies not only on communities, which need to see their role in more active terms, but also on governments and local and educational authorities, who need to modify their negative images about communities. The community has to be viewed as a source for educational development. The assumption that parents could not care less about education needs to be replaced by the assumption that parents do care. More positive expectations about the role of the community, parents, teachers, and students are a critical step toward a contextual conception of curricular change and reform. (p.180)



As Montero-Sieburth states, there is a reciprocal dimension that requires educators and developers to enter into a relationship with the community rather than authoritatively defining the community role.

Nielsen and Cummings (1997) promote what they call a community-oriented approach. By the 1990's, they are able to describe many innovative projects where communities are directly involved in some aspect of their children's education. Community members are presented as capable partners in education and it is suggested that educators work with the community, adapting to local values and needs. There is little discussion, however, about educators and community members negotiating sometimes divergent goals for the education system and what facilitates or constrains this negotiation. In his chapter in the Nielsen and Cummings book, Williams lists lessons for improved school-community relations (1997, pp. 68-71), but the focus is on educators and provides little information on what factors encourage or hinder community participation in this joint venture.

### **Interests of Educators and Community Developers**

There are two themes in the international development literature regarding the goals of strengthening links between community and education that are most relevant to this study. First is the importance of education for economic and social development. How educators and community developers perceive the connections between education and the economic and social development of the community is important to how they perceive the connections between the school and the community. It is in this area that the community is most often considered a passive receptor of education.

Second is the increased effectiveness and efficiency to be achieved through parent and community involvement. Parents and community members are more likely to be seen as active partners in educational activities as they are encouraged to become involved in school activities, governance, and financing.

### *Economic Development*

An understanding of the importance of a well-educated workforce for economic development, human capital theory, became well established after World War II (Schultz, 1971). By the 1970's, educational researchers called for North American educational policy support of the "assumption that developing better human resources for economic development ought to be the primary criterion by which educational excellence is defined" (De Young, 1989, p.106).

In a more recent review of educational priorities, the World Bank recommends "educational reform as an important component of economic reform programs" (1995, p.154). The World Declaration on Education for All states that an educated populace allows a society to address problems such as "mounting debt burdens (and) the threat of economic stagnation and decline" (Little, Hoppers, & Gardner, 1994, p.230). Tilak even recommends that education be given a higher priority in national economic development planning (1994, p.181). Economic reforms aimed at providing sustainable employment often drive education reforms, stressing the need for coursework that is more relevant to work, thus preparing students for employment (Haddad & Demsky, 1994).

A discussion of vocational education trends is an important part of the discussion of how educators and developers see the links between education and economic

development. The case study of educational reform in Burkina Faso described the pendulum swing from academic to vocational education. The trend moved from academic programs set up by colonial powers through the green revolution's focus on agriculture in the 1960's and 1970's. The World Bank followed these trends between 1963 and 1982, funding 117 educational projects that included a vocational component. These projects constituted 20% of all World Bank educational lending (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, cited in Gannicott, 1990, p.xv).

While agricultural and other vocational training can be accomplished through both nonformal education and continuing education programs and provided by post-secondary institutions, this discussion focusses on the curriculum offered through the elementary and secondary school programs. Vocational programs cover a variety of skills, but in general, directly train a student for a particular trade upon leaving school. One vocational stream, agricultural training, is prevalent in rural areas such as the group of Fijian islands in which Totoka is situated.

While the link between education and development appears to be strong, a country with a comprehensive education program and a highly educated population may continue to have social and economic difficulties (For example, the case of Sri Lanka, Colclough, 1993). As LeBlanc concludes in his paper on implementing 'relevance education', "educational reform cannot be isolated from the macro socio-political context in which it is embedded" (1990, p.145). Educational reforms cannot be isolated from the community that is receiving the education.

The 'vocational school fallacy' formulated by Foster in 1966 described how attempts to ruralize the curriculum by providing agricultural courses failed in Africa and Asia

because local populations were not only looking for higher paying white collar jobs but were also affected by the “broader structures of prestige and reward in society” (Gould, 1993, p.117). Academic programs in developing countries historically offered the status of the colonizing power along with the colonial language and culture. Over the years, with the decline in the colonial power, an academic education still maintained the ability to bestow status, now held by the country’s own upper class. Academic programs have been criticized for not providing a relevant education for the majority of the population, in essence operating as a selection process offering only a few people the opportunity of reaching the top (Gould, 1993).

At the same time, education systems in developing countries were criticized for spending a large portion of their education budgets on university education, graduating too many people with irrelevant academic degrees. The priority became to educate people for the work that was assumed would be available to them. In agriculture-based economies, this led to agricultural education programs, under the assumption that agricultural education would be most ‘relevant’ to people living in agricultural areas. A side benefit would be to stem the flow of people from rural to urban areas, as they either recognized the economic potential of their rural areas or recognized that they did not have the skills to succeed in the city.

The case study of Burkina Faso presented above gives an indication that the economic development, and therefore the education, envisioned by the planners was not the same as that hoped for by the community. In a case study of a community in Papua New Guinea, Demerath concludes that economic perspectives on education may not take into consideration

how local people's assessment of the utility of education involve their perceptions of structural conditions and their own culturally mediated attempts to maintain worth.... [L]ocal assessments of the value of educational investment involve issues of resource availability, knowledge, identity, and power. (1999, p.191)

National planners and educators may only be taking into consideration employment opportunities in planning vocational education programs, but individuals may be processing a wide range of factors in making decisions regarding education and their family's situation (Long, 2001, p.224). Demerath suggests some of these factors: resource availability, knowledge, identity, and power.

Some writers recognize the importance of including the community in educational planning. Gould concludes that the school could be an "active force for local economic and social development" under certain conditions:

Where there is some element of decentralization with some local inputs into education decision making, then people in these communities - parents, children and even those with no direct link with the school - will be more likely to be involved in defining and implementing local needs, and to see the school as contributing to achieving them. (1993, p.122)

Gould recommends a new model of education that would be "more related to local cultural realities and aspirations" (p. 210). Unfortunately, he does not expand on how to involve community members in this decision-making.

After two decades of attempts to diversify secondary curriculum to include a larger number of vocational and agricultural programs in developing countries, educational funding agencies recognized the limits of these reforms. A World Bank Report in 1988 concluded, in what Gannicott calls "a remarkable piece of honesty" (1990, p.xv), that the reforms in Africa were "...not worth their higher costs" (in Gannicott, 1990, p.xv).

Nevertheless, reforms aimed at increasing vocational and agricultural programs are still common in many developing countries and Fiji is one of them.

Because of this strong belief that education is directly linked to economic development, when parents do not respond to educational programs by sending their children to school, educators and developers assume that parents do not correctly understand the benefits of education. A home environment that is supportive of learning (Epstein, 1992; Montero-Sieburth, 1992) as well as positive attitudes towards education by other community members (Ogbu, 1992) are important for school success by students. However, too often poor parental attitudes towards education are assumed to be the cause of problems such as poor attendance and low achievement.

In North America, the “deficit-difference paradigm” attempts to explain why minority children fail at school by looking at how their home environment differs from and is deficient compared to a middle-class white home (Valdes, 1996, p.36). As a result of this theory, programs are developed to fix the home environment and one component of most parent involvement programs in schools focuses on improving the attitude of parents towards school (p. 38).

This theory is also prevalent in discussions of education in developing countries. Uemara’s review of the importance of community participation in education finds that one of the rationales for participation is that it can improve the home environment “by encouraging parents to understand about the benefits of their children’s schooling” (1999, p.9). The World Bank review of the Primary School Development Project in Ghana recommended a two-prong approach, the first of which was to “raise awareness of the value of education” (Condy, 1998, p.6). A survey of Head Teachers in Fiji showed that

33% thought that children did not attend school because of “Parent’s lack of concern about education” (Save the Children Fund, 1998, p.20). While the lack of concern may be because of larger concerns about other family issues, focus groups of community leaders agreed that a major reason for children dropping out of school was “lack of parental commitment to a child’s education” because they “do not value education” (p.20).

There may be limits to the validity of this view of parental attitudes. The successful Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) primary education initiative “questioned the accepted ‘wisdom’ that illiterate parents do not value education, and their experiment proved that this is not true” (Anderson, 1992, p.58). The Fijian Save the Children Fund survey of parents found that even those “whose children had left school expressed a high value for education” (1998, p.25).

Nevertheless, as a result of this theory of parental attitudes, many programs in developing countries where school attendance and achievement are low include a component to counteract a perceived poor attitude towards education. The Basic Education and Life Skills programme (BELS) throughout the South Pacific has Community and Parental Support (CAPS) as one of its key modules. The CAPS manual states that “In a rapidly changing world like this, it is very important that Pacific Island communities should be helped to change their attitude towards education and employment in order to prepare their children better for the future” (Townsend & Elder, 1998, p.13).

Post-colonial Fiji has experienced constant pressure to move away from an academic curriculum to more vocational education, particularly agricultural education in rural areas. For decades, parents have resisted this reform, continuing to prefer to register their

children in academic programs. Poor parental attitudes and misunderstandings of the value of vocational education are often blamed.

In Fiji, the move away from the British colonial academic education model began when the Education Commission in 1969 found that the curriculum lacked “relevance in many of its subject areas to the local environment and to local needs” (in Sharma, 2000, pp.134-35). As a result, vocational studies, which often included agricultural components, were introduced at the secondary school level.

Fiji followed the international trends of educational reform based on increasing vocational programs from 1975 - 1985, as indicated by Development Plans VII, VIII, and IX issued by the Government of Fiji. The reasons for this reform varied. While the development plans tried to deal with the large numbers of unemployed graduates (Tavola, 1991, p.40), they also attempted to increase the numbers of graduates, particularly ethnic Fijians, by emphasizing a vocational curriculum (Gannicott, 1990, p.13). These two goals are not actually as contradictory as they appear; agro-technical courses were expected to increase the number of graduates while also increasing their employability.

The Pacific Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1999 states:

There is a clear need to make education programmes more relevant both to national priorities and to people’s needs for knowledge, skills and livelihoods. (p.46)

This need is based on high unemployment of “graduates with few useful skills” (p.46), a shortage of technical graduates and a situation where many primary school graduates in the South Pacific remain in rural areas. The report comments that “insufficient resources



are given to vocational education, despite its obvious relevance for both men and women” (p.46). The report does not include recommendations but it is clearly advocating vocational education as being more relevant, especially for rural populations.

In recommending reform from an academic curriculum to a technical/vocational program, Development Plan VII (1976-1980) expected more than increased graduation and employment. The changes in the education system were expected to make positive changes in “rural development, distribution of income, [and] slowing the migration to urban areas” (in Gannicott, 1990, p.15). A great deal was expected of a non-academic curriculum.

Regardless of these grand expectations, the plans of the educators were thwarted by demands from parents for an academic curriculum. Because of the strength of local school committees in the Fijian education system, the government’s control of curriculum was limited. Despite government initiatives, schools responded to parent pressure by adding academic programs (Tavola, 1991). By Development Plan IX, 1986 - 1990 a further initiative was added: to change the attitudes of parents towards vocational training (Tavola, 1991, p.41). Despite efforts to change attitudes, schools in Fiji continued to offer and even expand their academic programs, while vocational programs were often neglected.

In a more recent study, the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel Report in 2000, Sharma discusses the continuing public attitude in Fiji that technical and vocational programs were second-rate and gives several reasons for this perception (pp.132-148). First, the salaries of white-collar jobs that required an academic education were considerably higher than for tradespeople graduating from a vocational education

program. The starting annual salary for a teacher with a two-year teaching certificate was \$10,436<sup>4</sup> compared to \$4,347 for a Class 1 Tradesman. Secondly, vocational programs were rarely able to predict labour requirements for a particular region and graduates were often disappointed in actual job opportunities available to them. Finally, the second-rate view perpetuated itself as fewer resources and poorly trained teachers were provided to these programs, because they were not seen as an educational priority.

Despite parental preference for academic programs, vocational programs were still offered at the secondary level in Fiji in 2000. These programs focussed on those skills that were relevant to finding wage employment<sup>5</sup>. Common areas of study offered at the secondary school level were tailoring, food and catering, carpentry and joinery, automotive engineering, and secretarial studies. These provided training for jobs in the garment industry, tourism, construction, mechanics, and offices. Sharma also mentions that agricultural science was being offered at some schools (2000, p.138).

The Blueprint for Affirmative Action on Fijian Education specifically mentions agriculture studies as one of its strategies aimed at Objective 7: Meeting the needs of Fijian school leavers<sup>6</sup>. It recommends “relevant” curricula in secondary schools “that is appropriate to the economic activities and the resources of their districts” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p.10). The achievement of this objective will be indicated partially by

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<sup>4</sup> All monies are given in Fijian dollars. In June 2000, 1 Fijian dollar was equal to \$0.80 Canadian.

<sup>5</sup> There was a lot of work in a subsistence economy - but not paid work. Wage employment refers to work that provides a cash income.

<sup>6</sup> School leavers in Fiji are those that receive the “School Leaving Certificate” after Form Six.

“programmes in schools [that] reflect the needs of the rural communities” (2000, p.27).

The implication is that relevant curricula for rural areas have an agricultural focus.

Sharma does not comment specifically on agricultural education, but in discussing vocational education in general, he mentions that vocational programs are imposed by decision-makers outside of the communities. As a result, community members do not understand vocational programs and therefore do not support them. He recommends more community participation in the decisions regarding vocational education programs (p.139). Once again, parents are accused of not having the correct attitude towards education, this time towards a particular program. And again, the assumption is made that if the parents’ attitude could be changed, in this case by being involved in the decision-making, then they would support the school system as it is provided to them.

Gannicott does not agree that attitudes need to be changed. He found that the situation in Fiji was consistent with other countries that attempted to stress occupational training within the formal school system. He concluded that

Parents and their children accurately perceive that the best chance of getting the best jobs is to get as much education as possible, and no amount of vocational education in the schools will change this. (1990, p.15)

Gannicott appreciates that parents’ educational decisions were not misguided owing to poor attitudes and lack of information, but were the best decisions based on their situation. Gannicott believes that parents make these decisions based on what is needed to get a job.

This review shows the changes in theories regarding how education is linked to economic development. Educational programs have changed as a result, with Fiji following these trends, particularly in the areas of agricultural and vocational programs.

### *Social Development*

Social development is also seen by educators and community developers to be connected to education. The use of education in social development has two divergent objectives; one is to maintain culture and language and the other is to change attitudes and behaviours.

### *Maintaining Language and Culture*

Formal education is often charged with being a major reason for past loss of culture and language, particularly in colonized countries where the curriculum consisted primarily of the colonizer's language, history, and culture. Especially in communities where children were taken away to boarding schools and punished for speaking their language or observing cultural traditions, the school system has been held responsible for the loss of traditional language and culture.

As a result of this history many communities and educators now look to the school system to counteract this loss (Assembly of First Nations, 1988; Native Indian Brotherhood, 1972; The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). In the South Pacific, Thaman calls for more cultural inclusion in Fijian education as a means for maintaining the culture (1993). In Canada, a group of Spahomin First Nation members, gathered to draft educational goals for their school, stressed the importance of education for the health of the entire community:

We the Spahomin First Nation are committed through education to maintain and enhance our cultural and traditional values, specifically, the family, [their local language], spirituality and our natural resources. At the same time we recognize the importance in excelling in academic and technical areas. We seek to attain a balance in the intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual well being of each individual [member]. We are bound together in a common goal to achieve self-esteem for each individual and self-determination for the community. (community members in Charters-Voght, 1991, p.63)

Not all attempts at using native language for instruction are as successful. While doing a study for the National Council of Educational Research and Training in India, Maheshwari describes visiting a well-equipped government school in a village. A teacher reported that many villagers preferred to send their children to an expensive private school, some distance from the village, where instruction was in English, a language that was not spoken at home. While educators promoted instruction in the students' first language and developers promoted relevant curriculum focussing on life skills, the parents in this village seemed to value a different kind of education for their children, an education offered through a colonial education system. Parents' views of education were being affected by a history of colonialism and current pressures of globalization; however, the school system did not seem to be paying any attention to this community's educational goals or attempting to enter into a dialogue with community members regarding the goals of the educational system. Maheshwari concludes that students were handicapped by poor support by illiterate family members, that "learning should be related to life skills," and that it would be "necessary to involve the community for ensuring that school functions for the full working time and all the teachers are present in the school" (1997). While surprise is expressed that "illiterate farmers and workers prefer English medium education for their children," Maheshwari does not provide any information about the factors affecting the community's attitude towards the local school

and how the relationship could be improved so as to increase community involvement, as he recommends.

Beykont relates a similar instance of resistance to native language instruction in Peru. In this case the community was not involved in planning or implementing the new language policy. The results of an ethnographic study by Hornberger (cited in Beykont, 1997, p.105) revealed that the community members believed in the importance of learning Spanish for economic reasons but wanted to maintain a separation between home and school. Beykont's review of a number of case studies finds that "the success or failure of a bilingual policy is a function of parental support and parental involvement" (p. 105). However, one of his conclusions at the end of the chapter is that "political and economic motivation seem to override pedagogical and linguistic considerations in the choice of school-language policies for nondominant language groups" (p. 109). I would suggest that political and economic considerations may be a more important factor, determining whether or not parents give their support and get involved in the language program.

A belief in the ability of the school system to maintain culture and language was evident in Fiji in 2001. Hundreds of individuals and organizations, as well as many academics made submissions to the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel. Sadler wrote in the chapter on the National Curriculum:

The third prominent theme in submissions to the Commission was that schools should play a major role in promoting and reinforcing the distinctive cultures of different groups. Many deplored the loss of skill and interest in ancient traditions and activities. Some went so far as to argue that, because of a substantial decline in traditional cultural skills, values and customs, the schools should take on responsibility for strengthening the respective cultural traditions of the different populations that make up Fiji. (2000, p.272)

In response to these numerous submissions that requested more involvement by the schools in maintaining culture, Sadler cautions that “It is probably unwise and unworkable to transfer the primary responsibility for transmission and renewal of local values and culture from the community to the school” (p.273). He recommends that culture must be valued and included in the curriculum (p.287) but stresses that it is the family’s and community’s obligation to value, practice and impart culture.

Sadler is referring specifically to culture; however, in the next chapter of the report, Subramani goes on to recommend the school’s involvement in maintaining language:

First of all, Fijians themselves must reclaim and own the language.... [T]eaching and learning should continue vigorously in the mother tongue, that is, in the dialect of the particular locality. (2000a, p. 293)

Similarly, the Blueprint for Affirmative Action on Fijian Education<sup>7</sup> recommended a Fijian Studies program, including language and culture that would be “designed and implemented to promote its unique identity and to ensure its survival in a rapidly changing world” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p.10). Subramani, the many people who made submissions to the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel, as well as the Minister of Education, believed that schools should be teaching language and culture in order to strengthen and maintain them.

Fijian policy was that students be taught in their mother tongue, assumed to be Hindi or *Bauan*, the national Fijian dialect, and then study English as a subject until Class 4. Instruction for all subjects was then to switch to English, with the other language being

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<sup>7</sup> This blueprint was published in December, 2000 under the Minister of Education who had been appointed by the Military Government that took over control of Fiji after the attempted coup in May 2000. Fijian Education in this document refers specifically to education for Indigenous Fijians.

taught as a subject that was on the national exams. Practice, however, depended on the school's location and community, rather than policy. Schools serving a multicultural community, especially in urban areas where the student population had a number of mother tongues, relied on teaching all students in English from Class 1. The teachers at Totoka School, Classes 1 to 8, relied on teaching in Fijian, sometimes the national dialect, *Bauan*, but often in the local dialect, which is what all of the students spoke in their homes.

### *Changing Attitudes and Behaviours*

International organizations with many varying goals see education of children as a way of improving a community and a country. The World Bank, while usually focussing on the economic benefits, also credits education with the ability to improve the health of the population and allow people to participate fully in society (World Bank, 1995, p.1). The World Health Organization's program *Helping Schools to Become Health Promoting Schools* is based on research "...that school health programmes can simultaneously reduce common health problems, increase the efficiency of the education system and advance public health, education and social and economic development in each nation" (1998). The program includes many opportunities for the schools to promote health in the community. Egypt's successful community schools initiative grew out of UNICEF's community health education program. The community agrees to provide classroom space or donate land and build a new school. The schools provide a basic education, but there is an emphasis on health education in the curriculum (Cummings, 1997, p.233).

Schofield's review of school-community development projects in South Africa looks at how school reform can be linked to community development. While most of the



reforms included small-scale economic initiatives such as a vegetable garden co-op, he found that programs focussed on community development needs also contributed to community social and cultural development (2003).

Sometimes education is seen as a means for teaching third world communities values that are important in Western societies. Kochhar and Gopal found that

Educators...are beginning to recognize the relationship between (a) individual economic self-sufficiency and ability to participate in the work of a community, and (b) the role of children, youth and adults in personal decision-making and self-determination. In many countries, such as South Africa, India and the new Baltic states, concepts of liberty, democracy and individual rights are being integrated into educational planning at local levels. (1997, pp.115-116)

Kochhar and Gopal mistakenly equate providing educational opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities who are often excluded, with Western ideals of individual rights. What is missing from Kochhar and Gopal's advocacy of tying educational aid to full participation is a recognition of the needs and desires of the local community, the local patterns of rights and responsibilities often based on the community rather than the individual. Hawes and Stephens caution that in regards to educational decision-making "much will depend upon traditional political hierarchies and accepted social practices" (1990, p.27).

The success of educational reforms, especially those regarding the education of vulnerable members of the community, often depends on community support, especially the support of the decision-makers in the community. For example, the education of girls, in some places, is not limited by access as much as by social factors such as parental attitudes, gender specific roles and expectations, household responsibilities, and religious codes (UNESCO, 1997). As a result, programs aimed at increasing female participation

and reducing their attrition in schooling have to take into account local contexts.

A successful program in India held girls' classes in the evening to accommodate their family duties, but their real success was in convincing parents that schooling improved the girls' marriage prospects (Hallak, 1990, p.246). This success was due to a relationship between the school and the community whereby the educators understood the local context and were able to communicate their educational goal in a meaningful way to the parents. Instead of attempting to change parents' perceived attitudes towards education, the program dealt with actual attitudes and concerns.

The World Wildlife Fund in the United Kingdom has a separate website for their education program that "recognises the growing international importance of education for sustainable development" ([wwflearning.co.uk](http://wwflearning.co.uk)). The goals are to "enable [young people] to make informed decisions and take informed actions - as consumers, as employees and employers, in the democratic process, in their communities and homes." While this education may be for the future when those children become adults making decisions for their families and communities, there is also an expectation that the education of children will make a difference in the community in a more immediate sense. A school also provides a place in a community where information can be disseminated. Pamphlets and stickers are designed to be taken home, to be shared with parents. Because schools are short of books, organizations take the opportunity to develop reading materials around their theme and donate the books to schools.

Working with a nation's ministry of education can ensure that the goals of an organization are inserted into the curriculum for the entire country. The understanding is that through education the attitudes and practices of the future generation will be changed

to support those goals. The hope is that this education will also have an indirect effect on the attitudes and practices of the current generation of decision-makers, as children take the information into their community.

The people of Fiji seem to have accepted the role that schools play in socialization and many looked to the school system to take a part in creating a better country. In his opening chapter to the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel Report, *Re-inscribing Vision*, Subramani spends less time discussing the economic role of education than on its role “as a major agency of social change” (2000b, p.2). Many of the goals are long-term regarding social cohesion and social justice, but he concludes by saying that while the students will benefit from this curriculum “students and teachers will contribute to building better communities” (p. 16), implying that the social change will be more immediate.

Fiji’s education system has many organizations hoping to effect social change through the schools. Many international organizations have their head offices in Fiji, which has become the administrative centre of the South Pacific. The country also has many national organizations devoted to the social development of the nation’s citizens and communities. The list of groups and organizations that presented submissions to the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel indicates the various areas where education is seen as being an important avenue for change. A selection includes Bayly Welfare Clinic, Citizens Constitutional Forum, Conservation Agencies Network Group, Department of Environment, Fiji Council of Social Services, Fiji Human Rights Commission, Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, People for Intercultural Awareness, and the World Health Organization (2000, pp.480-485). These groups represent the belief that education can

change attitudes and practices in regards to the environment, social welfare, human rights, health, and democracy.

### *Effectiveness and Efficiency*

Parent and community involvement in education is seen as a means to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of education. A World Bank Review of priorities in educational reform lists household involvement as one of six key reforms that focus on improving mainstream formal education and overcoming illiteracy in poorer countries.

Educational institutions may be more accountable for their performance when households are more closely involved in the institutions that family members attend. Parents involved with a school are more likely to be satisfied and, even more important, to help make it more effective. Most households already contribute, directly or indirectly, to the costs of education, but they could participate in school management and oversight, along with their wider communities, and they could be given the possibility of choosing among schools. (1995, p.120)

A meeting of representatives from ministries of education of Asia-Pacific countries included “community participation and ownership” as one of their three areas of focus (UNESCO, 1997, p.5). The meeting participants called for closer partnerships in education in order to “help ensure the relevance and effectiveness of education” (1997, p.9).

In most literature, effectiveness refers to student achievement in the school system. Parent involvement in particular can have a positive influence on student achievement, although the literature shows that involvement of other community members can also be beneficial. As third world countries struggle to meet the costs of providing education, the involvement of local communities is used as a means to ensure the efficient use of educational funds. Community members are asked to contribute more to the financing of

education, but policy makers hope that community involvement will also increase accountability for government funds.

### *Increasing Student Achievement*

Research in North America shows that a partnership between schools and their local communities can improve students' experiences and achievement in schools. Epstein's review of research on family involvement in school activities found that families are important for children's learning, development, and school success. "The research suggests that students at all grade levels do better academic work and have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and positive behaviors if they have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging, and involved" (1992, p.1141). Cummins (1989, p. 62) posits that, through collaboration, parents gain a sense of efficacy which is communicated to their children, with positive academic results.

Some First Nations communities that have instituted local involvement in their education systems have experienced considerable improvement in student achievement. In 1975, Nisga'a students in grades 7 - 12 were three to four years behind BC averages and 90 % of them were dropping out of school. The Nisga'a School Board determined that the main causes of failure were a distant administration and lack of input from parents and students. After four years of changes that encouraged community involvement and recognized the students' culture and language in the curriculum, the drop-out rate had fallen to 20% and students were only one year behind the provincial averages on standardized test scores (McKay & McKay, 1987, pp.64-85).

In a study of parental availability and academic achievement in Swaziland, Zoller Booth listed 25 possible indicators of poor achievement, eleven of which referred to parental involvement such as “encouragement to succeed in school,” “frequency of child being read to,” and “amount of time at home to do schoolwork” (1996, pp. 262-63); all similar indicators to studies in North America.

Community involvement can be just as beneficial to student outcomes. Ogbu suggests that not only can the community support and encourage parents’ involvement, but that the students’ community can influence “students’ educational orientations and behaviours” (1992, p.12). It is also important to recognize that, in some cultures, family and community members other than parents share responsibility for educating the youth of the community (Hidalgo, Siu, Bright, Swap, & Epstein, 1995). Presented with numerous reports of how the school system has failed First Nations students in Canada, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that

All schools serving Aboriginal children adopt policies that welcome the involvement of Aboriginal parents, elders and families in the life of the school, for example, by establishing advisory or parents committees, introducing teaching by elders in the classroom, and involving parents in school activities. (1996, Recommendation 3.5.8)

This recommendation gives several alternative strategies to increase parent involvement in education and also highlights the importance of recognizing that other community members, such as elders, have a role. In this study, I have chosen to adopt this broader focus on community involvement rather than only parental involvement in schooling.

Most literature considering community involvement in education in developing countries concentrates on the question of financial efficiency, which will be covered in the next section. Literature on increasing student achievement and therefore the

effectiveness of the education system in developing countries often stresses the importance of teachers and curriculum. The very successful *Escuela Nueva* programme in Columbia gave teachers more control over curriculum, encouraged teachers to be involved in the community, accommodated individual student needs, and provided student self-directed study. Results were generally positive, showing students scoring high in academic achievement tests (Anderson, 1992, pp.67-78; Colclough, 1993, pp.135-138, Rowley & Nielsen, 1997, pp.55,198). Rowley and Nielsen give a few examples of the community's involvement that appear to be classroom activities where the students use the community as a resource. But the community seemed to be a passive recipient to this initiative in decentralization. Anderson's comment that "As [the community] saw each stage evolve - and work - they welcomed rather than resisted the next steps" (p. 76) gives an indication of the passive role that the community had in the programme.

Another, less-researched, program provides an example of more extensive community involvement in classroom activities which provided positive results. The difficulties in providing instruction in students' native language in Papua New Guinea, where there are over eight hundred language groups, seem insurmountable. But working with community members to plan and implement native language instruction proved very successful. Compared to students who were taught in the official language, students taught in their native language were found to be less likely to drop out of school (Beykont, 1997, p.84).

### *Community Contributions*

When community involvement is considered with regard to education in developing countries, the discussion does not reflect the broad spectrum of the community-school

relationship that I believe is important to consider. Instead there is a focus on community participation in governance or financing. For example, Shaeffer supports local school management as the key to successful educational reform in South Africa and describes various degrees of participation by the community from “simplest” to the highest: “actual community control of the school: participation in decision-making at every stage, from needs assessment to target-setting, programme implementation, budget allocations, and evaluation” (1997, Section 3.0). Lynch has a similar hierarchical typology of beneficial participation: provision of information, exchange of information, participatory consultation, rightful consultation, meaningful discourse (1997, pp.68-71). Again, the emphasis is on attaining full participation, which in his typology, refers to governance:

Full participation is critical in promoting economic, social, educational, and environmental development which is sustainable. (Lynch, 1997, p.61)

Parental attitudes towards education, attendance at school events, and communications with teachers are relegated to a lower level of participation.

Community contributions to the financing of education is a common theme in development literature regarding relations between school and community. Although citing the benefits of increased flexibility and improved instructional quality (World Bank, 1995, p.14), a major factor for the World Bank is that “communities which participate in school management are more willing to assist in the financing of schooling” (p.120). A review of externally funded educational studies in Africa found a great deal of similarity in the recommendations for decentralized responsibilities, stressing more local funding, increased student fees, and increased parent responsibilities for student boarding and transport (UNESCO, 1997, section 3.1). In his book, *Educating All the Children*:



*Strategies for Primary Schooling in the South*, Colclough's few references to community participation deal primarily with financing educational costs. He does acknowledge that reforms involving community members may provide benefits such as work-experience opportunities and adult education, but that their strength lies in cost-saving possibilities (1993, p.185). The Harambee schools in Kenya are often cited as an example of community involvement; however, the involvement is mainly community responsibility for providing the materials and labour to build the school facilities (Mwiria, 1991).

While Uemara's review of community participation in World Bank education projects recognizes a wide range of benefits including developing curriculum materials, identifying problems, and realizing democracy, many of the projects focussed on maximizing resources, through community contributions of money, labour and materials. Of the eight projects described in some detail, three highlighted community participation in constructing schools, three on increased parental financing and/or maintenance of the school (1999).

Many recommendations calling for greater community involvement have as their goal the reduction of educational costs for national governments and aid agencies. Lynch writes that recommendations for community participation are made "in the hope that this will improve the cost-effectiveness, efficiency of implementation, and sustainability of projects" (1997, p.67). He goes on to comment that "moves towards greater involvement of local communities in the provision of primary education have often been little more than a cynical and thinly disguised means to move the burden of financing onto the backs of the poor" (p.78).

## *Accountability*

Accountability refers both to expectations of behaviour regarding management of school funds as well as expectations of teachers' attendance and delivery of quality education. Funding agencies are beginning to call for more accountability on the part of teachers and management committees. Oxfam's education report finds that "Decentralisation of education has the potential to generate benefits in terms of accountability and service provision, but it also been associated with widening inequalities based on wealth" (2000). The World Bank also looks at accountability and found that school choice is often an incentive for cost-effectiveness and accountability; however, this is dependent on some availability of choice as well as the variety of choice (World Bank, 1995).

In describing a Community Support Program in Pakistan, Uemera gives an indication of how accountability could work.

The greater the participation of the community, both financially and in-kind, means they are more likely to demand accountability from staff. Parents are also more involved in the day-to-day management of the school where they see what is happening and what needs to be corrected.... [M]embers are empowered to report teacher attendance or behavior problems to the government and to recommend teachers for training. (1999, p.9)

Uemera finds that teachers and other school staff only felt accountable to the community when the community held some power over them. Governance, then, is closely linked with accountability.

There are various factors that have been identified as inhibiting full participation in governance: unclear roles, community members' self-interest, lack of resources, lack of skills, organizational and administrative barriers, conflict with traditional norms

(Shaeffer, 1997, Section 3.0), corrupt or inefficient government, and prohibitive or restrictive organizational cultures in the government or development agency (Lynch, 1997, p.64). As well there may be adverse affects resulting from community control: take-over by powerful or articulate community members, disillusionment due to failure of changes, and increased costs (Lynch, 1997, p.71). These will all affect the ability of the community to ensure accountability.

Suzuki (2000) identified three factors affecting accountability: lack of transparency in school finance, power imbalances between parents and teachers (including the headteacher), and distance between ordinary parents and school leaders. Transparency requires information being disseminated to those people such as community leaders or management committee who could then require accountability of those in control of the finances. The power imbalance and distance between parents and teachers could partially be rectified by an increased number of parents on governing bodies, as well as accountability mechanisms and repercussions for mismanagement.

Suzuki concludes that

The findings from the in-depth study at 4 primary schools do not support the contention that decentralisation leads to greater participation, which increases accountability of decentralised units. Contrarily and rather paradoxically, we have seen that participation has little effect upon accountability, which then reduces the level of participation, regardless of the extent of decentralisation in place. (2000, p.23)

Power differences between parents and teachers as well as between different groups within the community, for example between men and women, were very difficult to overcome. These power differences meant that the direct asking of questions that may be necessary to ensure accountability is contrary to social norms.

## **Factors that Motivate and Inhibit the Community**

Much of the literature on relations between the school and community focusses on the interests of the educators and the developers and how to convincingly communicate those interests to the community, with little direct discussion about the interests of the community. But drawn out of the literature are some indications about the factors that may impede interactions between a school and a community.

This discussion of the importance of education for economic and social development drew attention to the need to consider how community members perceive that education fits into the larger socio-economic context of their lives. Schofield's review of case studies in South Africa was primarily focussed on the economic development of the community, stressing that the programs grew out of the economic interests and needs expressed by the community. The case studies gave examples of communities and schools working together "identifying and implementing small scale, manageable programs that addressed concrete needs" (2003, p.202). Schofield concludes with questions about participation. Why did significant participation occur in some instances despite problems? Why did men, in particular, not participate? I would ask, what were the factors that encouraged or inhibited participation in the broader categories of interactions (attitudes, communication, involvement, governance, collaboration) between school and community?

Demerath (1999) finds that people's assessment of the "utility of education" takes into consideration resource availability, knowledge, identity, and power. Power comes up again in the discussion of accountability, when Suzuki (2000) refers to the constraints caused by power differences. Condy also finds that power and influence limited "full

community empowerment,” and that “local power relations and hierarchies need to be recognised as a fairly potent and entrenched aspect of community structures” (1998, p.16). Earlier, Condy alludes to how power operated to “encourage” people to participate:

But although most of them had engaged in communal labour, in many instance people reported that they had only engaged in this work because they were obliged to or would be fined if they did not, which does not of itself demonstrate much of a sense of real commitment and ownership of their school. (1998, p.12)

Despite the use of local power relations to get people involved in the school, Condy labels power as a limitation.

Condy’s discussion includes the greater power wielded by international organizations and national supervisors along with local teachers. In discussing community governance, Shaeffer (1994) suggests the importance of social relationships within the country and community (p. 117), colonial history (p. 119), and teachers’ attitudes (p. 168), all of which could explain the power relations between the various local, national, and external stakeholders.

The other limitation that Condy lists is “administrative and management skills” (p.16), the lack of which took ownership of the projects in Ghana out of the hands of most of the community members. Williams refers to the need to train people for collaboration (1997, p.68). Uemara lists as a “challenge” the need to assess the capabilities of communities and provide assistance (1999, p.13). Of concern is that the interests, motivations, and capabilities of community members in regards to education are often referred to as “challenges” or “limitations.”

As this literature review shows, while there are examples of community involvement in education that explain how to convince communities to support education and get

involved, there are few discussions of how exactly the interests of educators and developers are negotiated with the interests of the community members. While there is some indication of factors which inhibit involvement by community members, there is little indication of factors within the community that motivate community members' support for, and involvement with, the school.

### **3. THE RESEARCH METHOD**

The complexities of community-school relations are best described and understood through a long-term ethnographic study. As with any single-case study, site selection was very important and, for reasons explained below, I chose a community in Fiji and its local primary school. Multiple methods of data collection, including observation, interviews, and document review were used. On-going analysis directed the focus of the data collection while the process was conducted within an ethical framework.

#### **Site Selection**

My study could have been conducted in any developing country, however, I chose to concentrate on finding a site in the Asia-Pacific region because I am more familiar with that part of the world. For personal reasons I looked for a politically stable country. Because I have no other language proficiency, I looked for a country where English was widely spoken. Initially I sought out contacts with people at universities and development agencies in Asia until Cliff Benson, director of the Institute of Education at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, responded favourably to my research topic and my request for assistance.

As a former British colony and a developing country, Fiji provided the appropriate context for my study. English is widely spoken, as it is one of the national languages, along with Hindi and Fijian. While the Fijian school system is based on locally managed schools, there is a strong national ministry as well as numerous international agencies that have input into the direction of education. This engagement of local, national, and

international interests is common to most developing countries and creates the context for the research question of how multiple interests are communicated and negotiated.

Finding a definable community of one ethnic group became the deciding factor for choosing a research site. Most schools were predominantly Indian or Fijian but had students from both cultures. Because parents were free to send their children to the school of their choice, many schools drew students from a large geographic area, making it more difficult to describe the community. I looked for a school that served students from a compact geographic area as well as from one ethnic group because my purpose was to study the interactions between a school and a community, not to study the educational achievement differences between Indian and Fijian students, a much discussed topic in Fiji. A community of indigenous Melanesian Fijians was most suitable, given my background in First Nations education in Canada and the somewhat similar experiences of indigenous populations around the world with colonial education systems (in Canada, Barman & McCaskill, 1987; in the third world, Carnoy & Samoff, 1990; in the South Pacific, Thaman, 1993). While I found that the situation was different due to Fiji's history as well as current political and economic situation (described in Chapter 4), many of the education issues regarding preservation of language and culture were similar to those of First Nations in Canada.

In order to observe daily interactions between the school personnel and the community, it was important that the school be situated within a community. Additionally, since my entry to the community would be through contact with school personnel, a school that was situated geographically close to a community, would



facilitate access to community members. For these reasons, a boarding school was not suitable for this study.

Through my contact with the University of the South Pacific, I was invited to attend workshops conducted through the Basic Education and Literacy Support (BELS) program. At these training workshops, I was introduced as a researcher from Canada to hundreds of elementary teachers throughout the Western region of Fiji; some of them invited me to visit their schools. After visiting sixteen schools, I selected Totoka school and the community on the island of Totoka.

The three villages on Totoka Island made up a definable community made up of one ethnic group. The school served only children from the island, although some Totoka children attended other schools on the mainland. Besides being a compact community for my research, the location was also convenient. The island was close enough to the mainland to make it easy to do banking, shopping, and email. But the people still lived a mainly subsistence lifestyle, a situation which caused considerable dissonance between the theories of community development and education and the village reality.

As in any case study, the uniqueness of the specific research site must be recognized. For a developing country, Fiji had a relatively high standard of living and a high literacy rate. Therefore, Fiji was not necessarily typical of developing countries, but provided a good research context as the education system responded to the economic and social changes in the country. Within Fiji, the community on Totoka Island was unusual in many ways. The community had many political connections due to traditional ties to a powerful village on the mainland. Many of the traditional ceremonies as well as traditional hierarchies were maintained in the community. In comparison to many rural

communities, Totoka was fairly well-off financially because of the money coming in from tourism. As a result, the school had access to more resources than many other rural schools. While these elements set this community apart, they also highlighted changes that created tensions between educational theories and the educational goals of the local people. The uniqueness of the research site, as the community struggled with maintaining its traditions along with a transition to a cash economy, and the implications these changes had for education for the community, made this case study particularly valuable.

### **Entering the Research Site**

After one of the training workshops on the mainland, a teacher from Totoka asked me to attend a parents' meeting at the school at which, I found on my arrival, I was the invited speaker. My husband and I stayed on the island for three days, meeting the Head Teacher and her staff and many community members.

Once I had decided on the suitability of the community for my research, I returned to the island and approached the Head Teacher about taking part in my study, discussing my study with her, answering her questions and giving her a one page abstract of my proposal. Because my first contact with the community was through the school and the study did require the co-operation of the school staff in interviews and observations, I wanted the approval of the Head Teacher. After taking some time to think about it and asking some more questions, the Head Teacher agreed to participate and also agreed to take my request to the community. I gave her copies of my abstract as well as three bundles of *kava*: one for each village. I was not present when my request was presented to the community, but many people knew me from my visit to the parents' meeting at the

school. I was relieved to find out that the community, or at least the men who make such decisions, agreed to let me conduct my study on Totoka Island.

Soon I was able to move to Totoka Island to start my data collection. My husband, Gord, and I lived with Esiteri, the Head Teacher; an arrangement that had some advantages as well as disadvantages. Her house, along with the other teachers' housing, was not located right in the village and I was worried that this physical distance would make it more difficult for me to interact informally with people in the village. Living with the Head Teacher also gave me a closer association with the school than I had wanted. I did not want people to think that I was working for the school and would therefore not be open in their discussions with me.

Instead, I found that the distance from the village was an advantage. While at the beginning I had to look for reasons to go into the village such as going to bake a cake, I became quite comfortable going in to the village just to visit. I could then return to the Head Teacher's house to write in relative privacy. There was little privacy in the village and living outside of it provided me the time that I needed to write, reflect and simply to relax. Later in the research period, I arranged to live for some time with a family in each village. Spending several months in each village facilitated arranging formal interviews in that village and allowed the observation of community activities in each village.

The Head Teacher was also very helpful for me personally and for my research. She was well-educated, having attended teachers' college and having travelled to New Zealand to visit friends. She therefore had some understanding of the differences between her culture and mine, helping me to understand the differences, but also understanding some of my needs and peculiarities as a Westerner. She invited me to go with her to

community events, letting me know ahead of time what would be expected of me and, later, answering my questions about what I observed. She also helped us learn some Fijian. Nevertheless, while I acquired some words and phrases, I never did learn enough Fijian to converse in it.

### **Data Collection**

Throughout the two-year period of the study, I used a variety of ethnographic methods including observations, informal interviews, and document review as well as formal semi-structured interviews with individuals and groups. These ethnographic research methods allowed for a variety of data collection strategies, which provided a confirmation of the accuracy of my understanding of the information (Devereaux & Hoddinott, 1992). While in the research site, I asked questions to clarify what I was observing and I made observations that verified or brought into question things told to me in interviews.

My framework of the types of interactions between school and community was an important guide for my data collection. Instead of focussing on only governance or only on parental involvement in classroom activities, this comprehensive model ensured that the data reflected the many facets of the school - community interactions. Because a framework is missing from much of the debate about community participation (Reimers, 1997), I include here more information about how I developed this framework.

### ***A Framework for Community-School Relations***

As stated previously, I use the term “community-school relations” to refer to the interactions between a school and its local community. The community to which I refer is

the geographical community that is served by a school open to all students in a particular region. I do not imply any coherence by the use of the term; a number of ethnic or social communities may be included in the larger, geographical community. In fact, there may be a number of factions within the community, groups of people with differing goals and visions for the school and the development of their community.

My conceptual framework of the interactions between the community and the school is based upon Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969) and Epstein's types of involvement (1992, 1144-1146). Arnstein developed a 'ladder of participation' that described different levels of participation by the local people in a development project, each level providing the beneficiaries of a project with more opportunities for greater decision-making roles in the project. Using Arnstein's ladder of participation, Shaeffer (1994) gives examples of these levels of participation in an educational project as:

1. the mere use of a service (such as a primary health care facility);
2. involvement through the contribution of resources, materials, and labour;
3. involvement through 'attendance' and the receipt of information (e.g. parent's meetings), implying passive acceptance of decisions made by others;
4. involvement through consultation (or feedback) on a particular issue;
5. participation in the delivery of a service, often as a partner with other actors;
6. participation as implementors of delegated powers; and
7. most completely, participation 'in real decision-making at every stage - identification of problems, the study of feasibility, planning, implementation, and evaluation' (UNICEF, 1986, p.1). This implies the authority to initiate action, a capacity for 'proactivity', and the confidence to get going on one's own. (Shaeffer, 1994, pp. 16-17)

Reimers has suggested using Shaeffer's seven degrees of participation as the foundation for a model facilitating community participation in supporting educational opportunity (1997).

There are several problems with using Arnstein's ladder of participation to describe the various aspects of community-school relations. The focus of the various levels is on the role of the community members rather than that of the school personnel, although the level of community participation is often dependent on the largesse of the professional experts (Lynch, 1997, p.68-71). These experts, either development planners or educators, may decide that full participation by the beneficiaries of the project is important and the ultimate goal is the highest rung on the ladder. Arnstein was critical of development projects that were described as including the participation of local people but which were really manipulative or providing only token involvement; thus, this model focusses on leaving the bottom rungs of the ladder and climbing to the top. With the current emphasis on participatory development, only the last three rungs are even considered to be participatory, and while genuine participation as described by the final rung in the ladder may be the ideal, it is "a very ambitious goal - an ideal - likely unreachable (at least in the short-term) by many, if not most, societies in the world" (Shaeffer, 1994, p.18).

Besides being potentially unreachable, there are also problems associated with attempting full participation by community members in educational decision-making . The process may be taken over by powerful and articulate factions in the community. Community members may become alienated through disappointment or disillusion as their goals are not attained. There may be increased costs to the funding agencies incurred by increased consultation time, training costs, and incentives to the staff and community for participation (Lynch, 1997, p.71). Focussing on genuine participation by the beneficiaries of a project, development literature often recommends that experts, such as planners, developers, and teachers move into roles of facilitators and animators

(Lynch, 1997, p.71). This role does not take advantage of the skills and expertise that educators and other experts bring to the educational system.

The metaphor of the ladder depicts hierarchical levels, with the focus at the top, losing sight of the importance of the first few rungs on the ladder and the necessity of each and all levels. Community involvement through using the school, attending activities, and volunteering in classes is still important whether or not an active parent committee participates in genuine decision-making. Rather than presenting a dialectical relationship, with a balance between the knowledge and skills of community members and that of professional experts, emphasis is given to decision-making by community members. So while Arnstein's ladder of participation is useful in describing various levels of participation, it gives undue importance to a few levels.

Epstein's model of types of involvement provides an alternative to the ladder of participation and has been developed specifically from educational research. In describing how to build school and family partnerships in North America, Epstein suggests that "five important types of involvement help families and schools fulfill their shared responsibilities for children's learning and development" (Epstein, 1992, p.1145). Her recommendation is that schools develop programs that encompass all five types.

The first type of involvement is the basic obligations of families. These are the responsibilities of the family to provide positive home conditions that support learning and behaviour. The school can help families through parent education, training, and providing information.

The second type is the basic obligations of schools. The school is responsible, through a variety of means, to communicate to the family information about school programs and children's progress as well as encourage two-way communication.

Third, is the involvement of parents at school. Parents can be involved by volunteering in classrooms and attending student performances, sports, and other events. Schools can encourage involvement through appropriate scheduling of events and training volunteers.

Involvement in learning activities at home is the fourth type of involvement. Parents can monitor and assist their children with learning activities at home. Schools pass information on and provide directions to parents as to how they can help.

The fifth type of involvement is in decision-making, governance, and advocacy. Parents take participatory roles in parent advisory councils and school committees. The school assists by providing training and opportunities for contributing to school decisions.

Epstein also added a sixth type of involvement, including the important contribution that the community can make towards children's learning and development: collaboration with community organizations. Schools' collaboration with agencies, businesses, and cultural organizations on school programs can provide improved family access to community and support services. The school can also draw on community resources to enhance and enrich students' experiences.

While similar to Arnstein's ladder of participation in categorizing different types of participation, Epstein's model recognizes the importance of a variety of types of



involvement. Not all parents have the skills, time, or desire to participate in a governance role, but the vast majority of parents are concerned about their children's education and are interested in contributing in ways they are able (Montero-Sieburth, 1992, p.180; Hallak, 1990, p.140). The strength of this model is a broad description of involvement beyond participation in governance and the recognition that all levels of participation are important to student achievement.

This model also does not fully represent my understanding of the interactions between school and community. While adding on a community component, Epstein admits that there is little research in the area of community involvement in education. Her model focusses on family involvement in the first five categories rather than including community members other than parents. The entire community can be very important in establishing family attitudes toward school and providing resources and volunteers for school activities (Ogbu, 1992). As well, Epstein's model is primarily concerned with how the family and school partnership can improve student achievement (a topic widely critiqued and debated for its often narrow interpretation and connotations) and does not consider the school as having an important role in community development. My understanding of community-school relations places a greater role on the school regarding its obligation towards the community and involvement in community affairs.

Neither Arnstein's ladder of participation with its focus on governance, nor Epstein's types of involvement with its concentration on family obligations, represents the complex, multi-dimensional interactions between a school and its community, perhaps especially in a developing country.

Combining the various levels of community participation from Arnstein's ladder of participation and Epstein's notions of types of involvement in education, I have constructed a framework that more closely represents my understanding of the interactions between the community and the school. The five categories are not hierarchical levels, but are each important components of the connection. I have tried to more fully incorporate the community aspect, both the community role in education and the school's role in the community.

- **Attitude.** This concerns the attitude of the community towards schooling in general as well as the local school specifically, but also the community's attitude towards experts and the expertise that they bring to the community. The attitude of the professionals, such as school personnel and development workers, towards the community is important, and so is the abstract 'attitude' that is implied through curriculum materials and policies.
- **Communication.** Mutual communication must be considered: the communication by the school personnel to the community as well as the communication of community opinions and concerns to the school. This communication can be formal through such means as meetings and newsletters as well as informal through discussions inside and outside of the school, in which opinions are exchanged, formed, and modified. This communication can include simple information such as the time and place of activities, but also include information on policy decisions, mission statements, and roles and expectations.
- **Involvement.** Community members can be involved by attending school activities such as performances, sports, and meetings. Involvement includes

providing resources, materials and labour for large projects such as building a school or fundraising to smaller projects such as volunteering in a classroom or at a special event. The school may be involved in community activities, for example, participating in a cultural event or community clean-up. The school building may be used for community activities such as adult education classes, recreation activities, or health services delivery. Outside of school time, school personnel may be involved in the community as active members of the community: shopping in the community, serving on community committees, teaching literacy classes.

- **Governance.** While the previous category includes attendance at meetings, there is no implied decision-making role. The governance category includes consultation and participation in decision-making: both on the part of educators in community decisions and community members in educational decisions. The participation may be direct or through delegation.
- **Collaboration.** There may be participation in decision-making, but the community and the school could both operate very separately, with separate goals and visions. Or the school and the community may work together towards a common goal, with the school seen as a vital part of community development and the community playing a vital role in the school's objectives. This collaboration could occur at different levels at different times for different reasons. This collaboration could encompass a range of projects from a teacher working with a group of community members as they apply for small-business

funding to the school committee formally working with the community leaders to build a new structure that would serve as school and community centre.

It is difficult to write about these categories without implying a preferred type of interaction. However, I used this model, not to imply or construct a normative relationship, but to ensure that I included in my study all aspects of the connection between the school and the community. Many studies focus on one category of interaction between school and community, for example, community involvement in management (Smith, Thurlow, & Foster, 1997), schools that are involved in community economic activities (Schofield, 2003), or parental involvement in school activities (Zoller Booth, 1996).

I used this framework of five categories to direct my data collection so that I did not concentrate in only one area. I also used the framework to organize my data, but found that while it led to a very rich description of the interactions between school and community, it did not contribute to an analysis of the factors influencing the interactions. Nevertheless, I believe that using this framework enabled this study to encompass and represent the complexity of community-school relations.

### *Initial Interviews and Document Review*

My initial data collection, before choosing a research site, consisted of document review along with interviews with local researchers, and agency and government personnel. My readings covered a wide range: books, articles, reports, local newspapers. The Institute of Pacific Studies was the local publisher of books on education and development and the Pacific Collection at the University of the South Pacific (USP)

included masters and doctoral theses on education in Fiji. Local academics and researchers gave me copies of published and unpublished papers. International, regional, and national reports from international agencies such as UNDP (1999), UNICEF (1997), and Save the Children Fund (1998) included information on national demographics as well as about previous evaluations of education and community development projects. Education was a common topic in the local newspapers and magazines, giving me a sense of the local issues and community involvement in education.

Unfortunately, few materials were available from the Ministry of Education. Moreover, because of changes in personnel, I was never able to establish rapport with one person in the ministry so as to gain access to their limited resources. Copies of manuals and reports were often not available, since few seem to be printed. While research permits specified that a copy of the completed research be sent to the Ministry, less than half a dozen reports had been collected on a shelf, one of them in Japanese.

On the other hand, people were very willing to be interviewed. I conducted twenty-eight interviews with personnel at USP, international agencies and the Ministry of Education, including teachers. Through these interviews I gathered background information about the education system in Fiji, international aid programs in Fiji, and local issues regarding education, community involvement, and community development.

Collection of documents continued throughout my time in Fiji, and it expanded to include written material that was available in the community of Totoka. Most of these documents were school newsletters and reports for parents and the Ministry of Education.

Many of the connections made in the first five months, before entering the research site, were maintained. These connections were particularly useful as I negotiated the

cultural differences while in the community as well as for discussion and feedback as I started to analyze the data.

### *Length of Study*

The longitudinal nature of the study contributed to the strength of the research as it allowed time to establish relationships with community members (Mamak & McCall 1978), collect a variety of data and confirm observations and data collected from interviews. These observations and interviews were conducted over the period from July 1999 until May 2001, during which time my husband, Gord, and I lived in the community.

Because of the importance of personal relationships in Fijian culture, I decided to live in the community, letting community members get to know me before I started conducting formal interviews. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori researcher, explains about doing research in indigenous communities:

The relatively simple task of gaining informed consent can take anything from a moment to months and years.... Asking directly for consent to interview can also be interpreted as quite rude behaviour in some cultures. Consent is not so much given for a project or specific set of questions, but for a person, for their credibility. Consent indicates trust and the assumption is that the trust will not only be reciprocated but constantly negotiated - a dynamic relationship rather than a static interview. (1999, p.136)

While I found that asking for consent was not interpreted, as Smith warns, as rude behaviour, it was the personal relationship, so important in Fijian society, that provided me with the consent. Asking for and receiving consent is discussed further in the section on formal interviews.

As a result of living in the community for an extended period, taking time to sit and have tea as well as participate in special events and getting to know people before asking questions, Gord and I were accepted as part of the community, albeit as special members. We tried to contribute as much as possible to the everyday duties of the household in which we lived: cooking, cleaning, and laundry. We also attempted to participate in community events, which was difficult because we had very few skills that were useful in Fijian life. For example, I don't know how to cook breadfruit, weave mats, or serve tea properly. The only useful skill I had at feasts was doing dishes, which I insisted on doing, even though it made the Fijians somewhat uncomfortable because of my status. The result, however, was a greater acceptance as community members. One woman told me that they weren't used to seeing tourists doing dishes and therefore it was harder to think of me as a tourist. At a *kava* session, a visiting Fijian was offered the first bowl of *kava* and he indicated that Gord, whom he perceived as a visiting white man with more status, should receive the first bowl. The local men replied that Gord did not get the first bowl because he was also local.

### *Observations*

As explained above, I determined that it was best to spend some time in the community before conducting formal interviews. During the first three months living on the island, I made observations of school events, community events, interactions between school personnel and community members, and daily life in a Fijian village. Besides providing information, observations provided opportunities to confirm later information from interviews as well as stimulate questions for interviews.

Initially, when we lived with the Head Teacher, whose house was in the school compound only a few steps from the school, I spent time learning about the Fijian school. Although my study does not focus on classroom activities, spending some time in the classroom, becoming familiar with the school routines and curriculum was helpful. I observed formal interactions between the school and the community such as meetings and performances, as well as informal day-to-day interactions as mothers came at noon with lunch for the students and the young men and women came after school to play volleyball and rugby on the school grounds.

I also observed life in the three villages, accompanying the Head Teacher as she attended community events such as a funeral or performances for the tourists. One of the villages was right beside the school compound and as I became known to community members, I started to go into the village on my own, having tea or drinking *kava*. I watched as the women prepared lunch for the students, the men returned from their gardens, and the children returned from school, changing out of their school uniforms to gather firewood, fish, or play on the beach.

The first months were dedicated to data collection through observation rather than interviews. Once I had established relationships with people in the community, I began to conduct interviews, but my observations continued throughout the two years of the study. Eventually, these observations encompassed the full school year, from the first day ceremonies, through daily school routines, preparation and writing of exams, to the final school performance and closing the school for the holidays.

I did not take notes during my visits; that is, I never sat with pen and paper writing while life went on around me. As much as possible, I tried to be a participant in the



activities and the conversation. Several times during the day, especially immediately after returning from the village, I would spend time writing in my journal. The Head Teacher's verandah was often the coolest place and the students and parents often saw me sitting there writing.

### *Informal Interviews*

While I was observing school activities and life in the village, I was also having informal discussions with people. Fijian society is very social and these discussions often took place while having tea or around the *kava* bowl. After school, the Head Teacher would lay a mat outside in the shade and we would sit on it discussing the day's activities, her plans for the school, or my questions about things I had seen. Many times, while I sat on the verandah writing, parents or teachers walking by would stop to talk to me, frequently with a specific comment in mind that they wanted to share with me. These discussions would be entered later, from memory, into my journals.

During this period of conducting informal interviews, I realized that language and gender were limiting my data collection. Not surprisingly, those people who were most comfortable speaking English were the people with whom I was having the majority of my conversations. Others may have sat with us and listened to our conversations but were not as forthright with their comments. Also, it was mostly women who joined in these conversations. As a result I attempted to expand the scope of my interactions to intentionally include those who were not as comfortable speaking in English and to include more young men.

Because English was the national language and everyone, even the older people, had learned English in school most people were able to speak some English to me and many spoke English very well. I was therefore able to talk to people in English, for while I was able to learn some Fijian, I am not good at languages, and did not become fluent enough to conduct interviews in the language. While people appreciated my attempts at Fijian and they continued to speak Fijian together while I was with them, they were willing to give me a synopsis of their discussion and answer questions in English.

As someone from outside of the community, I also needed help to “understand the fine-grained meanings of behavior, feeling and values...and decipher the unwritten grammar of conduct and nuances of cultural idiom” (Merton in Collins, 1991, p.49). Upon reflection and reviewing my journals, I sometimes felt that I might be missing some nuance, especially regarding the more sensitive topics. Being able to return for follow-up interviews or to re-word a question in another interview gave me the opportunity to try to uncover these nuances.

Some members of the community were also invaluable in explaining Fijian society to me and answering my questions about what I had seen and heard, although I was careful not to betray any confidentiality with my questions. For example, when I asked the Head Teacher about someone’s comment, she pressed me to tell her who said it, so that she could talk to them. I had to tell her that my interviews were anonymous. These cultural guides, such as the Head Teacher, tended to be those who were most comfortable in the English language and I realized that my journals were full of discussions with them. I recognized the hazard of limiting my interviews to those who were well-educated

and spoke English. While my informal discussions continued to be dominated by English speakers, I tried to arrange the formal interviews to include a wider range of people.

I also became aware that most of my interactions were with women. Because Fijian society is quite segregated along gender lines, I had more opportunities to talk with the women, while cooking, weaving, or drinking tea. As well, the women tended to be the better English speakers making them more comfortable talking to me than were the men. Gord was helpful, sharing with me the discussions the men had around the *kava* bowl at night and relating some of the activities that he was involved in with the men such as playing rugby, fishing, and planting yams. I also took advantage of my relatively high status as a foreign woman to interact more with the men, joining them on fishing trips and *kava* sessions. Nevertheless, I found the young men on the island the most difficult segment of the community to include in my research.

Another aspect of data collection that became evident during these informal discussions was the fluidity of fact as described by Hau'ofa:

The recording and communication of ideas, of customary laws, genealogies, historical events, and rights and obligations of all kinds were very flexible, creative and highly politicised. Truth was, and still is to a large extent, negotiable. (1985, p.157)

As I talked to people in the villages, I learned the difficulty of determining a “fact,” such as who has been the chairman of the school committee. Since questioning someone’s memory of an event was rude, as much as possible I tried to confirm facts through interviews with a number of people. Sometimes the result was as many “truths” as there were interviews. Instead of concentrating on uncovering a particular fact, I focussed on

trying to determine the essence of what the person was trying to tell me by describing the event in a particular way.

As with the observations, informal discussions were recorded from memory after I returned to my room. Especially during my introduction to people in the village, I did not want to be taking out my notebook as soon as I met them. In addition, many of the conversations happened during the course of everyday life, when we were busy cooking or fishing. I concentrated on remembering the substance of the conversation or memorizing phrases which I would then record when I got back to my notebook.

### *Formal Interviews*

After collecting initial data through observations and informal interviews, after getting to know the people of Totoka, and them getting to know me, I started to conduct formal interviews with individuals in the community.

I conducted formal, semi-structured interviews, attempting to keep a balance between male and female and to have representation from the ranges of age and education. In order to have representation from all three villages and each of the *mataqali*, the extended family units, I lived in each of the three villages for several months as I conducted the interviews in that village. Teachers and the two school-committee chairmen are not included in this tally, as data were collected from them continually in formal and informal interviews throughout the data collection period (see Table 1).

Fifty-one people ranging in age from 14 to 78 participated in formal, individual interviews. Of the 33 parents interviewed, four were from the village but were living on

the mainland with their children at school on the mainland. The interviews also include eight unmarried youth without children and seven village elders.

Table 1 Participants in Formal Interviews

Age	Number Interviewed	Male	Female	Number of years of Education
14 - 19	5	4	1	9 - 14
20 - 29	14	4	10	8 - 14
30 - 39	11	3	8	8 - 12
40 - 59	14	7	7	4 - 11
60 - 78	7	5	2	3 - 8
Total	51	23	28	

My research does not include interviews with children because of the ethical and methodological difficulties in interviewing children which are increased in a cross-cultural interview. However, three secondary students acted as interpreters for their parents and offered their own views during the interviews.

While I planned to interview one person from each household the actual interviews were determined somewhat by protocol, by availability, and by chance. As a result some households were missed and some families were over-represented with several interviews. Pilot interviews were conducted with a few of the people that I knew best in the closest village. Then, following protocol, the high-ranking men and women were interviewed. As I tried to keep the interviews representative of the entire population, specific segments of the community such as the young men were identified for interviews. Often when someone was not available to be interviewed, someone else in the

household offered to answer my questions. A few people specifically asked to be interviewed.

As earlier mentioned, gaining informed consent from the interviewees was not so much a matter of them signing a paper as a requirement that I conduct myself in a responsible way gaining their respect and therefore their acceptance of my research activities. Initially, I was hesitant to present the interviewees with the consent form, worried that they would be intimidated by the page and a half of information including addresses in Canada and requiring a signature. The consent form was intimidating even for people from Canada and Australia whom I interviewed. However, by the time formal interviews were conducted, I felt that I knew the interviewees well enough to present the form for their signature. While not every interviewee even knew how to sign a form, they did not seem daunted by the formality of the procedure.

The interview started with a verbal explanation of the research and how the findings would be used. The interviewee received a paper which I had signed promising confidentiality; however, I explained that although I would not use their name or name the village, the Ministry of Education and the Senior Education Officer knew where I was conducting research and would therefore be able to identify some interviewees by their position, such as the *Turaga ni Koro* or the school committee chair. After reviewing the consent form with them, the interviewee was asked to sign the form.

Noone refused to sign the consent form, and nobody declined to be interviewed when asked. However, in a few cases, especially with young men, I was never able to arrange a time for the interview and this difficulty may have actually reflected a reluctance to participate. While Fijians will not often say no directly, they may not

actually be saying yes. In most cases, people were pleased to be asked as evidenced by the formality they gave to the interview and the requests by some to be interviewed.

The interview was conducted in a time and place requested by the interviewee. In most cases, they treated the interview very formally, arranging for me to come to their home, where we could be undisturbed inside the house. Sometimes they arranged for one of their secondary school aged children or a young adult to be present to translate, but generally, their level of English was such that we could communicate quite well.

As much as possible in a village setting, I tried to conduct the interviews privately so as to preserve the confidentiality of the interview and allow the interviewee to speak openly. In a few instances, on the interviewee's suggestion, the interview was conducted outside under a tree, which was a more public place. These interviews were more likely to be interrupted by people walking by, or by children coming to join us.

In several instances, the interviewee arranged to have someone else join us to act as translator, because they were not confident in their level of English. The translator was usually a family member, sometimes a son or daughter in secondary school, and these young people often offered their own opinions as well as translating their parents' opinions. In none of these interviews did I feel that the interviewee was constrained by the presence of a translator, which may have been true if I had to depend on someone from outside of the community or a teacher for the translation.

People on the island were fascinated by the computer and often wanted to watch me type, but I would tell them that I was typing up an interview and that I could not let them watch because of my promise of confidentiality. This was accepted by everyone and these exchanges confirmed my promise to the interviewees.

The formal interviews were semi-structured with a short list of questions appropriate to the interviewees' role in the community and whether they were parents of school-age children. I did not use a pre-set guide throughout the interviews, but planned questions to clarify or expand on data collected through observations or previous interviews. During the interview I then had the flexibility of asking further questions on a particular topic that arose.

The formal interviews started with collecting the names, ages, and education levels of the immediate family. The interview could then flow easily in a variety of directions: involvement in school activities, why family members had left school, how education had helped family members living in the village. Depending on the age and role of the interviewee as well as previous interview topics, the interview would focus on parent participation, the school committee, attitudes towards education, or changes in the village. The interviewee was asked if there was anything else they wanted to tell me and then I formally concluded the interview by thanking them for their time.

I did not tape-record interviews, initially because I thought the tape-recorder would intimidate the villagers. But as I recorded the interviews by hand in my notebook, I found that the time for writing gave the interviewee time to think and express themselves in English. They could also see what I was writing down, giving them clues as to what I found important to my research. This may have limited some responses, but had the advantage of keeping the interview focussed on educational issues. In a few instances, they read what I had written and confirmed or corrected my notes.



## **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was conducted throughout the study period using reflection, coding, and feedback to participants (as recommended by Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The process of transcribing my scribbled notes into a journal and then entering these journal entries into the computer forced a regular review of my data and continual reflection with accompanying analytical notes being added. Regular written reports to the International Development Research Centre, which funded my research, and to my doctoral research committee assisted in this on-going analysis. Regular discussions with other researchers at the University of the South Pacific and other organizations in Fiji also helped with this analysis, especially as many of them were very familiar with Fijian society and life in Fijian villages.

Surprisingly, the tourists who came to the island were very helpful sources of reflection. I was often asked to assist the tour leader who brought visitors to the village from the resort, answering their questions about Fijian life but also fielding questions about my research. This forced me to continually reflect on what I was researching and what I was learning. Some tourists were regular visitors to the island, having returned annually for many years and they were able to challenge or confirm aspects of my analysis.

Periodically, I would spend time on the mainland where I had electricity and privacy and could use the computer for analysis. Using both FolioViews and Atlas, my preliminary analysis consisted of coding my journals to find themes. These themes were then used to focus further interviews. By January 2001, I had a set of 23 statements that

were an initial summary of my research that was then presented to the community for their feedback.

### *Participant Feedback*

The long-term nature of the study allowed for on-going feedback to participants and verification of initial findings through group interviews with community members as well as formal reports. Three written interim reports were given to the Head Teacher and the School Committee Chair, the first being a general report on my research to date and the final two being specific reports of interest to the teachers and community on parents' meetings and the restructuring of the school committee. The first report was also given to the Senior Education Officer for the region but unfortunately, time and distance did not allow for further discussion with him about the research.

At the end of the two years of data collection, meetings were held with groups of community members in the villages. To ensure that everyone could attend and would be encouraged to voice their comments at a meeting (Nayacakalou, 1978), I planned to hold seven meetings in each village: male elders, female elders, married women, married men, women married into the village, unmarried men, unmarried women. I also planned separate meetings with the teachers and the school committee, for a total of twenty-three meetings. In the end, mostly due to scheduling difficulties around other community events, fourteen meetings were held: five with men, seven with women, one with teachers, and one with the school committee. In one village, the young women - married, unmarried, and married into the village - all came together in one meeting. So there were opportunities for most people to attend a meeting, but there were not as many meetings as originally anticipated.

The most under-represented groups in the feedback sessions were the married and unmarried men. Even though I made a presentation to the school committee, which was a large group including married and unmarried young men, in the traditions of meetings in Fiji, discussion was limited to the chairman and a few of the older men. The under-representation of this segment of the population was also evident in the tally of formal interviews. I hope that the range of young men that I did have a chance to interview fairly represent their age and gender group.

The feedback meetings were tape-recorded and I also took notes. In most cases, the discussion was in English, with those present at the meeting translating when necessary. I chose six statements that were most relevant to each age group. I was concerned about how to encourage an open discussion without immediate agreement with whatever I said, which would be the proper Fijian way. So I presented each statement, along with a question which asked for more information about the topic. (See Appendix 1) There was a lively discussion about many of the topics, giving me a better understanding of the issue.

As part of these meetings, I also asked for permission to write about their community and the things I had learned. In one meeting with the older women we had been talking about problems between the three villages, especially the organization of the school committee. I asked for permission to write about this in my reports and the woman beside me, who had not said anything up to this point, immediately said "*KUA*," no! As mentioned before, the polite Fijian way would be to agree with a visitor, so this exclamation of "no!" was significant. The status of the village was very important in Fijian society and a report that could negatively affect that status was avoided. As well,

direct criticism of individuals was avoided because of the importance of relationships in Fijian society. As will be shown in the following chapters, the importance of status and relationships as well as traditions must not be ignored.

But in this group meeting the women talked about how others could learn from their struggles and how it was important for the government to know some of the problems that came from the government organization of villages. The people of Totoka struggled as their social organization, economic system and language underwent changes. They were looking for new ways to merge Western ways with their traditional ways. After an intense discussion, these women gave their permission for the material to be used, hoping others could learn from their experiences.

I also talked to the village elders, men and women, about the confidentiality of the study. I explained how it was difficult, in such a small country, to ensure the anonymity of their community: the Ministry of Education and Immigration officials already knew my research site. As well, I explained, many people on the mainland were very interested in their resort as one of the few owned and managed by Fijians. I wanted to promote the resort but would need their permission to name it and the island. They decided that the benefits of promoting their business outweighed the loss of confidentiality. I promised, however, not to use individuals' names nor name the village in my written reports.

### *The Influence of the Coup of 2000*

Half-way through my research time, in May 2000, there was an attempted coup of the national government. This potentially violent situation did not affect me in as much as

I did not have to stop my research and leave the country; the political intrigue and instability did, however, have the potential to affect my analysis.

Parliament was overtaken by rebels, some of whom were Fijian soldiers, and members of parliament were held hostage for fifty-six days . While the coup was not successful, shortly after the hostage-taking, the military declared a state of emergency and took over the running of the country, appointing an interim president and prime minister. This interim military government was in place for the remainder of my time in Fiji and a general election was held in August 2001. My research site was far enough removed from Suva, the capital city and site of most of the conflict, that I was able to continue conducting my observations and interviews. However, as the political turmoil continued throughout the year I realized that there were more subtle repercussions on my research.

Avoiding Suva meant that I was out of regular contact with other researchers, the University, and the Ministry of Education. The methodology study-group of which I had been a member quit meeting because of an 8 pm curfew and the relocation of a number of members. As a result, I lost a number of contacts to whom I would have presented my results and from whom I could have received feedback.

Fiji's political situation was not quickly resolved and I found myself becoming frustrated with what seemed to me to be bizarre events and cynical about the motives of those involved. In their coverage of the coup, journalists expressed their bewilderment at Fijian behaviour. In his commentary titled *Fiji's ironies and muddled myths*, David Robie, who had lived in the Pacific for years and was then teaching journalism at the University of the South Pacific wrote:

I've tried hard to comprehend how ordinary Fijians could show undying support for terrorism, murder, violent robberies and total disregard for law and order - and still sing hymns and talk of God. (2000, July 24)

One of the Fijian English language newspapers described some of the seemingly inexplicable behaviour:

Only in Fiji can a hostage hug his hostage taker. Only in Fiji can a hostage taker humble himself and present the highest symbol of honour - a whale's tooth - to his hostage. Only in Fiji can people who were once strong enemies become so close again. (Only in Fiji, The Daily Post, July 14, 2000)

Gavin de Becker with APB News wrote how the complexity of Fijian society was not easy to comprehend from a Western perspective.

In many ways, it was a most peculiar sort of political coup. Played as a faraway sideshow by most U.S. media outlets, the takeover of the Fijian Parliament was a spectacle that suggested a complete breakdown of law and order. But, as all things Fijian, it was more complex than that.... Last week, I learned even more about how incredibly different Fijian culture is from America's when I was pulled into the turmoil of the final phase of this eight-week political crisis. (2000, July 18)

An Australian journalist wrote:

Brothers winking at each other across demarcation lines, rival factions getting into the *kava*, rebel soldiers shifting allegiances with impunity - to Western eyes the events of the Fiji coup can seem bewildering. (Brown, 2000, June 10)

My frustration at not understanding what was happening was evident in an excerpt from an email I sent home on June 20, 2000:

It's almost impossible to figure out what is going on and which news-reports to actually believe. Yesterday, FM96 carried an interesting bulletin: "There is a rumour going around Suva. We want to assure you that nothing is happening and nothing is planned!!" That seems to sum up negotiations for the last few weeks. It's confusing for the Fijians but almost incomprehensible to the rest of us. While the hostage-takers ostensibly were against Indian Fijians being in government, there are also many Fijian

factions that are fighting for power. There is so much history, relationships, connections, traditions that it is difficult to keep up.

Realizing how incomprehensible the coup was, I began to wonder if it was possible that I could understand even the small segment of Fijian society and behaviour that I had come to study.

During the state of emergency, I also spent extended periods of time on Totoka, becoming more aware of the local politics and discovering the family and political links to the different factions on the mainland. While not directly about the political machinations, a journal entry made six months after the initial hostage-taking gives an indication of my feelings during this time.

As I type the journal I find a number of emotions running through me: mostly negative. I'm frustrated with the lack of communication, lack of responsibility, their seeming lack of care for each other (Journal, November 2, 2000).

My feelings towards the community of Totoka were starting to mirror the frustration and cynicism that I felt with regards to the coup.

How can I be sure that my research was not unduly affected by the coup? Awareness is one of the greatest protections (Wolf, 1996); realizing the effect my frustrations could have on my research, I was able to check my analysis for undue cynicism. In addition, I read the news less and with more humour, trying to treat the coup with the insouciance given it by the villagers. Although the country continued to deal with the effects of the coup, I was able to move beyond the negative emotions noted above. I feel that my analysis of the community-school relationship in Totoka became more realistic as a result.

### *Analytical Framework*

Analysis pushed me to distinguish between the original framework of five categories of interactions between school and community, which supported my data collection and initial description, and a framework that supported further analysis of the data. The original five-part framework (attitude, communication, involvement, governance, and collaboration) was useful as a guide to the data collection, allowing me to uncover the complex nature of the association between school and community, but limited as an analytical guide.

As I moved through analysis and sought an analytic frame for the data, I refined and revised my original research questions. The original questions were:

1. How do community members and educators work together?
2. How are the various interests of parents, teachers, community leaders, and international development agencies communicated and negotiated at the local level?
3. How does the involvement of external agencies, such as CIDA, the World Bank, and churches offering aid, advice and personnel affect the relationship?
4. What is the influence of globalization on the school system and how is the community-school relationship affected by this influence?
5. How does colonialism continue to affect how the community relates to the school and how the school contributes to community development?



I realized as data analysis progressed that many of these questions focussed my attention off Totoka and beyond the immediate interactions between the school and the community, but that the data I had collected centred in the immediacies of how school life intertwined with daily life on Totoka.

I turned to the data to help focus my research (Marshall and Rossman, 1995), looking to see what themes were arising from the data and which questions were being answered. I realized that central to this analysis were the conflicts between the local realities of the community and the theories regarding the role of education in economic/social development, and the community's role in increasing educational effectiveness and efficiency. The interests of community members were not the same as the interests of educators and international developers.

The questions that became most relevant to the data were:

1. What are the factors that motivate or inhibit community members in their support of the local school?
2. How are the various interests of parents, educators, community members and international agencies communicated and negotiated?

These were the issues that community members and educators focussed on in their discussions and interviews with me. They were wondering why some people supported school events and others did not. Existing structures of communication and governance were being criticized because they did not seem to meet the needs of the community. Community members and educators spoke about what they saw as the main purpose of

education. By focussing on these two questions, I was able to concentrate on those issues most relevant to the community.

### **Ethical Conduct**

In this study, not only was I an outsider, but a white, middle-class academic from the first world, studying a group of people most of whom had less economic, political, and social power than myself (Patai, 1991, p.137). I had to conduct myself and my research with particular attention to the possible misuse of this privilege. The three inter-related dimensions of this privilege were (1) the research process, (2) my position in relation to the people involved in my research, and (3) the post-fieldwork phase (Wolf, 1996, p.2).

### *The Research Process*

*Working with Indigenous Knowledge: A Guide for Researchers* (Grenier, 1998) recommends that researchers be approved by the appropriate national agencies as well as local community leaders and conduct their research within the guidelines of the community. Neither the University of the South Pacific nor the Ministry of Education had guidelines for research in Fiji and so I used the community guidelines given by Grenier as a framework for the ethics of my research process: requesting permission from appropriate authorities, following local protocol, responding to local research needs.

I applied for and received approval for my research from the Fijian National Ministry of Education and Technology and the Immigration Department. I kept in contact with officials from the Ministry of Education, meeting with them about the progress of my research. Although the only stipulation was that a copy of my dissertation be filed with them, I provided them with interim written reports. While the Ministry of Education

officers in Suva did not require that I inform the region of my intentions to conduct research in his region, on the recommendation of the Head Teacher I met with the regional Senior Education Officer who was very supportive of my research.

There are no specific guidelines for researchers entering and conducting research in a Fijian community, but there are formal rituals for all visitors to a Fijian village. As more fully explained in the section regarding entering the research site these protocols were observed. After approving my research, the Head Teacher took my request, along with the requisite bundles of *kava* to the school committee and the community leaders, who also approved my research in their community.

Conducting a long term ethnography allows the researcher to focus on the place of study, being responsive and flexible enough to allow the research to emerge from the local context (Haig-Brown & Archibald, 1996, p.259). Certainly, during the time I spent on the mainland, meeting educators and reading the literature about education in Fiji, I was able to learn about the issues of concern to educators in Fiji. There were two issues specifically that it was suggested that I study: the examination system and the gap between educational achievements of Fijians and Indo-Fijians. While I appreciate the importance of these issues, the topic of examinations was beyond the scope of my research topic and a discussion of the difference in achievements is best handled by local researchers who have a better understanding of the cultural, historical, and political contexts. Both of these issues are addressed in the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel Report (Bacchus, 2000b; Sadler, 2000) as well as by White (2001).

### *The Research Relationship*

Sometimes the research relationship is one of manipulation, exploitation, and misrepresentation of the research subjects who have no voice and receive no benefits from the study (Said, 1989). Because the ethnographic process emphasizes interaction with the research participants, I tried to ensure that this was a respectful relationship. Time spent in the community, as well as discussions with local researchers and community leaders, helped me understand how to act respectfully in this particular context.

For example, I attempted to follow the rules of dress and behaviour in the village that Fijians refer to as being respectful of the village. Especially for women, there are strict expectations about dress: cover the shoulders and knees, no shorts or slacks, no T-shirts, no jewelry, no hats. Usually Samuela, who escorted the tour from the resort, explained to the tourists how they should dress for the village, but the villagers were lenient with the tourists. One day, I expressed my surprise that the tourists were in shorts and very short skirts. Samuela said that he knew it was hard for the tourists to dress properly when it was so hot. Similarly, the Head Teacher often told me that I could wear shorts or my bathing suit to go swimming, but I tried to dress the way the Fijian women dressed, wearing a skirt and blouse while swimming close to the village. It appeared that I was successful when, after the first few months on the island, the Head Teacher told me that the women were asking what Pacific Island I was from, since I did not look or behave like a tourist.

Although I tried to fit in to life in a Fijian village, some distance was necessary between myself and the people involved in my research. There had to be a balance

between identification with and separateness from the research participants. By identifying myself as a researcher, I attempted to reduce the ambiguity about my intentions and therefore the possibility of manipulation of others. Maintaining my identity as a researcher and not primarily as a friend emphasized my intellectual responsibilities and guarded against my exploitation of others for my own support and approval (Patai, 1991; Martin, 1996). My continued identity as an outsider helped to keep the research relationship explicit.

As an outsider I carried certain powers and privileges with me, even though I did not have any traditional Fijian markers of power in the society, such as age or heritage. My identification as a white westerner had important implications for my research in Fiji, not only because it is a former British colony, but because of the position of the Eurocentric viewpoint as the “dominant consciousness and order of contemporary life” (Battiste, 1998, p.7). I had to understand how the vestiges of the colonial relationship as well as the current global political economy affected how my research participants responded to me as well as how I related to them (Said, 1989). Because of the powers that Europeans had in colonial relationships, and the power Westerners continue to have by virtue of their relative wealth, many Fijians continue to treat white westerners such as myself with undue respect. For example, I was often seated beside the highest-ranking woman during *kava* ceremonies. If there were seats on the tourist boat to the mainland, I would be given priority over Fijians waiting for a seat. Recognizing my place in the local hierarchy gave me a personal understanding of the role of status and relationships in Fijian society.

This understanding of my position and the resulting power relations was important for the ethical conduct of my research. This power carried the risk that I could intrude

into people's lives without their consent, manipulate the research subjects and exploit them and their knowledge for my own research purposes without concern about the effects of my research on them. As mentioned before, I attempted to give villagers free choice as to whether to be interviewed, respecting their wishes regarding time and place of the interview. I told them how I hoped my research would be used but explained that what they told me might be read by others in the community or people in positions of power. My responsibility lay in acknowledging the inequitable power relations between others and myself with an attempt to deal with them without pretending the difference did not exist (Haig-Brown & Archibald, 1996, p.250).

I was not totally successful in communicating my purpose for being in the village; even towards the end of my research time, a woman asked me why I was asking all of these questions. While it was difficult to explain my identity as a researcher, I tried not to mistakenly be identified as a tourist, which was the most common role for visitors to the island. I talked frequently about "working," turning down an invitation for tea with an explanation that I had an interview to do or that my trip to Suva was for a meeting with the Ministry of Education. I often sat outside my *bure* where people could see me writing in my journal or taking notes while I read. Many people could understand that I was a student and I explained that I was there to learn from them.

I found the expectations of the Head Teacher and her staff more difficult to manage. They saw me as an education expert from Canada and hoped that I would be able to help them with their most pressing problems, mainly improving exam results and the students' English. Unfortunately, I am not a reading specialist nor do I have much experience teaching English as a second language. Unable to provide the teachers with direct advice

about reading, I helped them access more information, gathering resources from the University of the South Pacific and educators living in Suva.

### *Gift-giving*

Gift-giving became an issue because it is so central to Fijian society, and I felt the need to give something back to the people that had helped me so much. But I did not want to take on the role of foreign benefactor as did many tourists, purchasing stoves and generators and even sponsoring emigrants. In my proposal, I heeded the advice from a researcher with experience in developing countries (Wilson, 1992, p.189), and planned to give the entire village a substantial gift at the end of my research. This plan, however, did not take into account the gift-giving expected from members of the community as part of community celebrations or the sharing that is a regular part of community life.

Whether it is a birthday, a funeral, or the building of a new *bure*, the *kava* ceremony is an important part of the Fijian celebration, and a gift of *kava* is expected, especially from a member of the community such as myself, who is not able to provide food but who has the cash to buy *kava*. Also, as I moved between the three villages, a gift of *kava* was presented to each hosting family upon my arrival and departure. I bought *kava* for the final meetings in the villages. As well, every evening there is at least one gathering of people in a home where *kava* is being served. Over the course of the last year, I bought \$354 (Canadian dollars) worth of *kava*. This recognition of their custom was an important part of my acceptance in the community and after presenting *kava* at one celebration, I was also included in the sharing of the feast, carrying back to my host family a basket of cooked food.

More difficult was responding to the custom of asking for gifts: Fijians are expected to share. For example, when one of the villagers received his retirement pension pay-out, people came to him and asked for help to pay for family ceremonies, boat payments, and building a new house. He gave away \$12 000 of the \$27 000 pension. For most villagers, sharing involved giving away extra fish from a large catch or allowing others to pick mangoes from their large tree. Because I did not have a garden and obviously had money, I was often asked to buy things for people. After each trip to the mainland, I would return with newspapers and bread to share, especially with the extended family with whom I was staying and the leaders of the village in which I was living. While not expensive, these gifts were much appreciated.

My trips to New Zealand and Australia were more difficult as many people asked me to bring things back for them: clothes, rugby shoes, wool. To a degree, Fijians are limited to sharing with their cousins, but, in a way, I was everyone's cousin and so everyone felt free to ask me for gifts. During my trip to Australia, I was fortunate to be given two large suitcases of used clothing that I divided among the 30 families in the village where I was living at the time. Nobody received a great deal, but everyone seemed happy and the village head came to formally thank me for the gifts to the village. Unfortunately, there were times when I was told or I suspected that I had offended someone by not giving them a gift.

As much as possible, I tried to give services rather than purchased gifts. I would mail letters, deliver food to family on the mainland, or get information from government departments and agencies. In particular, I tried to find ways to help the school as a way to give back to everyone on the island. I helped the Head Teacher produce a newsletter that



was given to tourists as part of a fund-raising campaign. I worked with a number of mothers to make a large reading book. I also sometimes taught classes, especially when a teacher was sick, although I did not do this on a regular basis.

I still wanted to give something substantial to the island upon my departure, as planned in my initial research proposal. A gift to the school seemed the most appropriate, as it would benefit the most families. The projects planned by the school committee (a generator, a dormitory, a fence) were beyond my budget. Because the school funds were not well accounted for, I was hesitant to give a donation of cash towards one of these projects. In the end, I purchased a set of encyclopedias, other student reference books, and some teacher resource books.

While I was always questioning whether I was giving enough or not enough and to the right people, I feel that over the course of the time at the research site, I found the right balance. While I did not give as many material goods as some of the foreigners who came for a short holiday or to set up a business, I gave what I felt was appropriate to my position as a member of the community.

### *Postfieldwork Phase*

Some ethical considerations of the postfieldwork phase concern power over voice and representation or misrepresentation that occur as part of the analysis and the writing of the research report and publications. There are also issues of possible exploitation in the dissemination of results and the overall benefits accrued from the research.

Research in and about other cultures is filled with the misrepresentation of 'the Other' (Said, 1989), since less powerful research subjects have no access to what is being

said about them or have no voice to protest. This misrepresentation could be a misunderstanding because another culture was being viewed through a particular perspective. Sharing and discussing my preliminary analysis with research participants, both individually and in the group meetings, and requesting their input into my interpretation provided them with some control over my representation of the research topic and the community (Fine & Weis, 1996; Inuit Tapirisat guidelines in Grenier, 1998, p.88). The analysis, however, is ultimately mine.

My goal of “speaking with instead of speaking for” has implications as well for the writing of my research results. Battiste sees a role for outside researchers in “helping Indigenous people articulate their concerns, but to speak for them is to deny them the self-determining so essential to human progress” (1998, p.15). People in non-Western countries have experienced centuries of being written about and spoken for by European explorers, anthropologists, and researchers representing ‘the Other’ to a European audience. However, this does not mean that I should not accept my responsibilities as a researcher or that I should not speak at all.

One of the difficulties around telling people’s stories concerns anonymity. I have followed ethical guidelines regarding offers of anonymity (Inuit Tapirisat guidelines in Grenier, 1998, p.87) with a recognition that this anonymity is very difficult to ensure within a small community within a small country. In setting the context of the study, as I describe the community, many people in Fiji will be able to identify the specific community. In any case, many local researchers, educators, and staff at the Ministry of Education knew where I was conducting this study. It is a short path then to identifying the one Head Teacher or the one *Turaga ni Koro*. Rather than relying on anonymity, I

have sought approval from the community for what I have written about them. At the group meetings, I told the participants that what we had talked about would be in my written reports, asking and receiving their permission to present their community in this way.

The final dissertation will be sent to the community. Historically, Indigenous communities and individuals have been exploited as they have provided time and commitment to outside research projects that have taken the resulting knowledge out of the community. Although my research does not involve collecting disappearing historical data or indigenous scientific knowledge, it is still incumbent upon me to share the results with the community. Copies of this dissertation will also be given to the University of the South Pacific as well as the National Ministry of Education.

While I write this, distance prevents an ongoing discussion with the community members about what is being written about them. Nevertheless, the time I spent getting to know individuals in the community and knowing that I will be returning to the island guarantees that I am always conscious of how they may respond to what I have written. Even if they do not read the dissertation themselves, they will likely know what has been written as the results of this research are distributed in Fiji.

I have no delusions that my research will change the nature of community-school relations in developing countries, but I do believe that a greater understanding of these relations is important for educators, government ministries, non-governmental organizations, and international funding agencies. The people who have given their support by participating in my study have trusted that there is some importance to it. I have a responsibility then to write articles and make presentations to organizations in

Fiji, Canada and elsewhere, sharing with those who decide educational policy, based on what the people of Totoka have so freely shared with me.

With these ethical considerations in mind, I move to a description of the country of Fiji and the community of Totoka.

#### **4. THE COUNTRY OF FIJI AND THE COMMUNITY OF TOTOKA**

Because this study was conducted within a particular community it is important to understand some of the context within which this community existed. Fiji was a country with a strong traditional culture as well as generations of British influence as a British colony. While not a full discussion of each of these topics, the following section gives a further description of Fiji, its history, current economic and social situation, culture, and its education system.

##### **Political History**

The Republic of the Fiji Islands is a group of over 300 tropical islands in the South Pacific. There are two large islands where the majority of the population lives and several groupings of smaller islands spread throughout 1.3 million sq km of ocean.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Melanesian peoples of the islands had formed “small, kin-structured chiefdoms” (Routledge, 1985, p.66) engaged in on-going battles for political power. Among the European traders, the Fijians developed a reputation as being ferocious cannibals, effectively limiting the amount of contact with European colonial powers.

It was European and Tongan Christian Methodist missionaries who effected a great change in Fiji in the 35 years after they landed in 1835. Ravuvu proposes that

Today hardly any Fijian would deny the efficacy of Christian religion in influencing and changing the life of the indigenous people from one in which barbaric practices were the order of the day to that in which peace, neighbourly love and tolerance are emphasised. (1988, p.24)

While Ravuvu's statement seems to denigrate pre-Christian Fijian life, it is representative of many Fijians' feelings towards Christianity. The influence of the churches, especially the Methodist church, in everyday life as well as educational, political and economic spheres, continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With European imperial powers carving out colonies throughout the Pacific in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Eastern Fijian high chiefs preemptively ceded the Fijian Islands to British rule (Lal, 1983, p.7). Weighing the options, the Fijian chiefs decided that British rule would be most advantageous to themselves. Without consent of Western or Interior Fijian chiefs, Fiji became a British colony in 1874. The early Colonial government had as its over-arching goal the policy of protecting the indigenous Fijians, to "shelter the native inhabitants from the competitive pressures of the modern world, and allow them to proceed at their own pace under the paternalistic hand of the government" (Lal, 1983, p.8). As a result of this policy of preserving Fijian culture, workers were brought in from India to work the sugar plantations. There is some speculation that immigrant labour was necessary because Fijians were poor workers. However, others believe that the Governor's policy of indentured labour was an attempt to preserve Fijian connections to their land and thereby protect their culture (Lal, 1983, p.9). Another factor favouring indentured labour from India would have been the declining Fijian population, which was being decimated by European diseases.

In addition, the chiefs, by whose invitation the British were in Fiji, opposed recruiting men to work in the coastal plantations. In their letter to the governor they stated their preference for Fijian men to stay to work in their villages:

If they remain at or near their homes and worked there, the benefits they would receive would be comparatively greater than those they receive by hiring themselves out to distant places as labourers. (in Lal, 1983, p.8)

This period of colonial law, known as Native Affairs Regulations, was in effect until World War II (Ravuvu, 1988) and allowed the British colonial government to attempt to preserve a traditional culture and allowed the Fijian chiefs to maintain their traditional powers over Fijians. Contrary to the belief that the Fijians were lazy, it was these restrictive Fijian laws that limited Fijian economic activity to subsistence fishing and farming, keeping them out of the wage labour force.

In theory, the indentured labourer system provided labour for British plantations while providing poor Indian families a chance to make some money. An indenture fee was deducted by the employer to pay for the return passage to India. Between the years of 1879 to 1911, 60 965 immigrants were taken to Fiji, representing the range of Hindu castes and also Muslim and Christian groups (Lal, 1983, p.13). Very few labourers were ever repatriated and generations later, Fiji had become their home.

In Fiji, the term “Indian” is used to refer to the Indo-Fijians, while “Fijian” refers specifically to indigenous Fijians. I have adopted this common usage throughout this dissertation.

Governor Gordon’s stance toward the Fijians included other policies meant to ensure continuation of their society as it existed in the late 1800’s. They were guaranteed to have the land that they needed for their villages and farms and as a result, in 1998 over 90 percent of the land in Fiji was owned communally by the traditional clans, the *matagali* (Osman, 1998, p.9). This land could not be sold but only leased to farmers, businesses, government ministries, and schools. Another 1800’s regulation limited the free

movement of Fijians, requiring permission to leave their village and allowing only those working for the church or the government to live for extended periods away from their village (Ravuvu, 1988, p.48). While these policies were restrictive, Fijian culture at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was strong and had not suffered the degradation seen in many indigenous cultures.

This is a short summary of some of the aspects of Fijian history that have been strong influences on the Fijian school system: British colonial powers and their church, land ownership, the mass immigration of Indians. The traditional Fijian society and culture are described in more detail in a section of their own, as is the actual history of the Fijian school system.

The Republic of the Fiji Islands peacefully achieved its independence from Britain in 1970. However, its history of competing chieftainships, ethnic divisions, and land ownership contributed to three coups, two in 1987 and one in 2000. The unstable political situation following these coups resulted in the emigration of professionals, including teachers, and an overall downturn in the economy.

### **Economic and Social Indicators**

While Fiji may be categorized as a developing country, the people of Fiji enjoyed a relatively positive economic and social environment, compared to other developing countries. On the Human Development Index, measuring life expectancy, education, and standard of living, Fiji rates fourth in the Pacific and 101 out of just over 200 nations globally (UNDP, 1999, p.13). UNICEF uses a measure of under-5 mortality rate to indicate the satisfaction of basic human needs to a population. Fiji ranks 118<sup>th</sup>, on par



with Argentina, Jordan and the Ukraine (UNDP, 1999, p.93). Other indices also show that the benefits of Fiji's economy, education, and health services are fairly equally distributed to both genders (UNDP, 1999, p.23).

All of the South Pacific countries face the challenge of providing their citizens with a "secure, sustainable livelihood that meets their aspirations" (UNDP, 1999, p.73). The rich natural resources of Fiji allowed those with access to farmland and fishing rights to secure their basic needs through subsistence farming and fishing. However, the wish to improve their living conditions by the purchase of goods such as imported food stuffs, fuel, outboard motors, and generators moves most families into the cash economy.

In 1986, 20% of Fijians were involved in the formal economy receiving a wage, 34% were involved in the informal economy including self-employment and selling fish and produce, and 46% were categorized as not economically active (UNDP, 1999, p. 74), although many of these would be involved in unreported activities, such as occasional handicraft sales to tourists or reselling store goods out of their homes. By 1998, there were more opportunities for wage employment in the garment and tourism industries, many however, provided low wages and little job security. The 1998 official unemployment rate was reported at 7.5% (UNDP, 1999, p. 109); however, the Bank of Hawaii's *Economic Report* warns that unemployment and underemployment, a result of part-time and seasonal employment, was much higher (Osman, 1998, p. 16). Therefore, a job in the public sector was highly regarded, providing secure, relatively well-paid employment.

While the majority of Fiji's citizens enjoy a good standard of living compared to people in other developing countries, there are a number of factors that could easily

threaten their ability to provide the necessities for their families. As mentioned in the discussion of Fiji's history, the country is susceptible to political instability that weakens the economy and puts pressure on existing social services. Fiji is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters including cyclones, floods, droughts, and earthquakes (UNDP, 1999, p. 30). While death tolls resulting from these disasters may not be large, the subsequent loss of garden produce, potable water, and fishing periodically leaves many families in desperate conditions.

For many Fijian families, the natural resources of their traditional lands and fishing grounds provides them with their basic needs. Cash income by some members of the family helps ensure the security of the family during natural disasters. Cash income also gives families an opportunity to enjoy luxuries such as a generator for electric lights or an outboard motor for their boat.

In summary, Fiji is on the verge of being a stable economy although it is still heavily dependent on the natural resources of the land and ocean. While not economically rich, many people in Fiji are able to support their families off these readily accessible natural resources. A growing economy is allowing many families to secure a better standard of living.

## **Culture**

The following is not meant to be a complete description of the Fijian culture as space and time do not permit a full description, it was not the focus of my research, and it was not possible for me to come to understand the culture in a short two years. What is presented here is an overview of some of the facets of the culture that I came to recognize

as important to an understanding of the interactions between the community that is part of the Fijian culture and the school, which operates under a different culture.

Fijian culture is not homogeneous throughout the islands, nor are its traditions unchanging, but the values from which the traditions spring persist despite the changes in language, dress, or economy (Hau'ofa, 1985, p. 155). While Fijians are drawn to progress and change, "it is noticeable that people who 'make it' in the big world fall back on tradition when they find life in the other world too trying and cumbersome" (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 6). I have relied heavily on the literature written by Pacific Islanders to explain the complexities of these traditional values and how they affect everyday life.

Hau'ofa (1985) lists eight of the most important indigenous values: group interest, sharing of goods and services, sense of place and social continuity, intimacy in interpersonal relationships, oral traditions, self-sufficiency and self-reliance, care for members of society, and arts and entertainment integrated into community life. He was not writing of specifically Fijian values but of values that he believes are common throughout the Pacific; however his list is supported by Fijian authors' descriptions of traditional Fijian life (Nayacakalou, 1978; Ravuvu, 1988) and is a useful introduction to Fijian life.

Group interest is often called communalism in contrast to the individualism of most Western societies. The welfare of the group comes before the rights of the individual. Basic needs are met through the social and cultural framework of the kin group and "individualism is loathed and discouraged for the sake of group solidarity and harmony" (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 14). In Fiji, this is most pronounced in the communal ownership of land, where the *mataqali*, a large extended family grouping, holds land and fishing rights.

Individuals are given land to work but are not able to sell that land (Nayacakalou, 1978, pp. 110-111).

The group interest is often seen in Totoka in the communal sharing of work, where a group of men go together to plant yams, women gather to weave a mat needed by one of them, or students freely copy each other's answers. This group interest is extended to the sharing of goods rather than accumulation by one person. It is usually a large catch of fish or a ripening mango tree that is shared, but includes purchased food, clothes, and books. An important tradition in Fijian society is that of *kerekere*, which is perhaps inaccurately defined by the Fijian dictionary as begging (Capell, 1991). Ravuvu (1988, p. xiii) defines it as a request, and Fijians use the word as an equivalent to the English word, "please." So, in the village, my hostess might tell me to go to her sister and "*kerekere*" some lemons. But it is not a request that can easily be denied, especially to siblings and cousins. Nayacakalou (1978) gives examples of *kerekere* which show it as a complex, formalised system of exchange of goods, including money, and services. As well as a system for the distribution of goods, *kerekere* also cements relationships as there is an expectation of return in kind some day. "In this context, any social action becomes an economic action and vice versa" (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 9); *kerekere* therefore is an important aspect of the traditional Fijian economic system.

There is a sense of place and social continuity as personal identities are tied to a place and to kinship ties. When asked, urban Fijians will inevitably identify themselves as being from a village or *vanua*, even though they may never have lived there. The *vanua* may be defined as the larger political unit that the *mataqali* members belong to. But it is more than that; "a very strong triad which links living people, the physical areas

upon which they thrive, and the spirit world of dead ancestors and other cosmological entities” (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 6). The *vanua* is more than land or ancestors, “It is the Fijian worldview, ethos, and cosmos, all living and non-living things wrapped in one” (Thaman, 1997, p. 15).

There is intimacy, or close familiarity, in interpersonal relationships, even “business” relationships. Common to many small, subsistence economic communities, personalized relationships are the basis for social, political, and even economic activity. The dependence one has on the relationships with others in order to survive strengthens the relationships, often based on kinship.

Although most Fijian adults are literate<sup>8</sup>, oral traditions continues to be an important part of life, especially through the stories and sharing that happens around the kava bowl. Hau’ofa contends that these oral traditions include the understanding that the teller has control over the facts of the story, shaping the truth for a purpose (1985, pp. 157-158).

The people of Fiji are proud of being self-sufficient and self-reliant. While individuals depend on others for survival, the community as a whole is self-sufficient, with the skills to take advantage of the natural resources. Living a subsistence lifestyle often carries the implication of being impoverished, but in the Pacific islands the necessities for life are readily available in the immediate environment, providing a comfortable life.

The close kinship ties and communal nature of the society provide a secure environment for all members of the community, including the old or disabled. The chief

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<sup>8</sup> A preliminary report on the 1996 government census shows a literacy rate of 95% for males and 91% for females (UNDP, 1999:105).

functions as provider and protector, demanding services and tribute from the people under his authority, redistributing goods to provide emergency relief, to reward services, and to provide for community feasts.

Villagers did not begrudge such material expenses and services for the chief were merely a channel through which community services were provided, and the villagers identified the chiefs' affluence with community affluence. (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 174)

The chief who makes decisions is usually related to those who implements the decisions, so his authority is based as much on a close personal relationship as on an inherited authority.

Government laws and democratic rights undermine traditional authoritative leadership in Fiji (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 173). The chief no longer holds absolute authority in a community and the people often look to the legal system to settle disputes. The chief is more often a figurehead, serving as a mediator, rather than the ultimate law.

Arts and entertainment are integrated into community life. While Pacific Islanders are often described as fun-loving and easy-going, Hau'ofa explains this attitude as a result of the integration of the arts and entertainment into everyday life. It is not easy to tell the difference between work and leisure as the group activities including gardening, fishing, house-building, and food preparation appear to be as much a source of entertainment as necessary for survival. A sense of ceremony as well as fun are part of most everyday activities. While willing to work hard for their community and family, Fijians are not prepared to accept "a life of joyless toil" (Hau'ofa, 1985, p. 105).

Many of these Fijian values are represented in the *yagona* or *kava* ceremony. *Kava* is a drink made from the dried root of a type of pepper plant. The root is pounded and water

is infused through the powder. The drink is neither alcoholic nor a restricted drug but it does have a calming effect on the nervous system. *Kava* pills can be bought in North American health food stores as a natural relaxant. But the facts about *kava* do not convey the importance of the drink in Fijian society. While some of the details described below may be specific to the community of Totoka, the substance of the ceremony is common throughout the islands.

In the traditional ceremony, the hierarchical nature of Fijian society is immediately evident. The *kava* bowl divides the area, with the chief sitting directly in front of the bowl and any high-ranking people, including women and guests, sitting beside him. Everyone else is crowded in rows behind the *kava* bowl. But both levels of the hierarchy are included, for after the first bowl is presented to the chief, a second bowl is presented to someone sitting behind the bowl. The woven coconut sinnet which extends from the *kava* bowl towards the chief is a strong symbol of the link between the people and their *vanua*, represented by the chief.

The *kava* ceremony is an important element in the economic system, providing a formal opportunity to make requests as well as time to solidify the interpersonal relationships. Almost any important request that is made between Fijians is initiated through a presentation of *kava*. A village member presents *kava* to the chief in order to *kerekere* a garden plot for his son. When requesting assistance from another village, a chief will present *kava* to the neighbouring chief. The parents of a new school teacher from a different community will present *kava* to a *mataqali* in the community to request that they 'adopt' the teacher while he or she teaches there. Tourists present *kava* to a village to ask permission to visit the village or anchor their yacht in their area. After the

formal ceremonial opening, the *kava* drinking becomes a relaxed time for discussion and story-telling, further cementing relationships.

In Fijian culture, group interest and the relationships within that group are highly valued. These relationships are strengthened through the sharing of resources and a common sense of place and identity. While individuals are dependent on the group and responsible for each other, the group is self-sufficient. Ceremonies, such as the *kava* ceremony, reinforce the relationships within and amongst groups.

## **Education**

Fiji's relatively high ranking on the Human Development Index is partially due to a high adult literacy rate (UNDP, 1999, p. 12), the result of a well-established education system. This section looks at the history of the education system in Fiji as well as the current organization of schools, including school structure, school committees, and teacher training. Finally, education statistics for Fiji are compared to other Pacific Island and developing countries.

### *History*

The Fijian system of education reflects a history common to most colonized countries, a drastic change from traditional education to a formalized system based on a European colonial power, in this case Great Britain. Of particular interest, is the history that led to most of the schools in Fiji being managed by local school committees.

Prior to formal schooling being introduced by Europeans, Fijian society had a system of informal and non-formal education, imparting pragmatic knowledge necessary for individual survival and continuation of the society. Through observation and imitation of



adults and older siblings, children learned survival skills such as food gathering and preparation as well as the behaviour necessary to be accepted as a member of the community. The community's history, values, and view of the universe were also passed on by the sharing of stories and legends by elders in the community. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, formal schooling had not replaced these traditional modes of education, but instead the two forms existed side by side, especially in rural areas where extended families still depended on subsistence activities (Baba, 1986, p. 122). Children continued to learn the traditional skills and values necessary for survival through observation and imitation.

Some aspects of traditional education are particularly relevant to this study. First of all, parents are not necessarily the focus of educational activities. Elder members of society, both male and female, play important roles as did older siblings and members of the extended family such as aunts, uncles, and cousins (Baba, 1986, p. 121-122).

Secondly, education takes place within an oral tradition. Hau'ofa explains that rather than being tied to their cultural traditions, members of an oral society, particularly the story tellers, are able to adapt and change the story, with the result that

The recording and communication of ideas, of customary laws, genealogies, historical events, and rights and obligations of all kinds were very flexible, creative, and highly politicised. Truth was, and still is to a large extent, negotiable. (1985, p. 157)

This view of truth as a flexible entity has repercussions for the researcher, as I explained previously in the discussion on research methods.

Hau'ofa discusses how entertainment is a part of all group activities even serious ones such as funerals or education. Many *kava* sessions include a group of men singing

traditional and popular Fijian songs. Singing of hymns is a regular part of school activities and the students learn traditional dances and songs which they perform for the community as well as for tourists. Hau'ofa describes life in a Fijian village as full of "the enjoyment of life and sense of fun"(1985, p. 159). This sense of fun extends to school activities outside of the classroom, such as yard clean-up or school performances.

While there is a great sense of fun in Fijian life and in aspects of school life, there is also an emphasis on obedience and respect. Mara, Foliaki, and Coxon explain that hierarchical societies require the reinforcement of obedience and respect through their education system (1994, p. 182). These aspects can be seen in education in Fiji today, where the traditional hierarchy is replicated in the classroom and where total obedience and respect are expected towards the teacher, who imparts knowledge without question or criticism.

The British Colonial government of Fiji did not set out to create a colonial education system; Governor Gordon purposely chose not to provide education for his Fijian subjects in an attempt to avoid the destruction of culture and society that he had witnessed in Africa and attributed to education (Tavola, 1991, p. 12). From the arrival of the first missionaries in 1836, through cession to Britain in 1874, until the 1916 Education Ordinance, formal schooling in Fiji was provided by the Christian missions. Largely through the conversion of chiefs and through their subsequent decrees, many Fijian children attended these mission schools. The Methodist schools were small, located in the villages, and used Fijian teachers who taught in the vernacular. The aim was to teach a level of literacy, usually four years, to enable the children to read the Bible. The strong influence of the church and this interlinked history of church and

school had a profound effect on education in Fiji. The fear of being labelled “heathen” or “uncivilised” became equated with being “stupid” or “uneducated.” Ravuvu saw the school and the church being viewed as “sacred institutions” with the result that

The fear and shame of being categorised as being *tamata lialia* (stupid) or *tawa vuli* (uneducated) has put great pressure on people to send their children to school (1988, p. 36).

The Catholics, on the other hand, set up centralized, academic schools which taught in English. The sons of the Fijian chiefs were also offered the opportunity to attend the schools provided for the British families living in Fiji and many of Fiji’s elder statesmen went on to further education in England. For example, Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, a Fijian senior administrator in the Colonial government, received a degree from Oxford as did Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara who was Fiji’s first Prime Minister (Firth & Tarte, 2001). The small mission schools and centralized elite schools became the basis of Fiji’s formal education system, with Fijians accustomed to basic education being readily available to all of their children, with special opportunities for a select few (Tavola, 1991, pp.7-12).

The government also saw no need to educate the indentured Indians that they had brought to Fiji as unskilled labourers. But it was pressure from the Indo-Fijian communities, as they started to establish their own schools outside of the mission churches, that initiated the move to a national education system, based on community-managed schools (Tavola, 1991, pp. 10-11). This was the impetus for the development of an education system where local communities have a great deal of responsibility and control over their schools. Responding to the public demand for education, in 1916 the colonial government agreed to provide teachers and oversee curricula and testing for communities that built and managed their own schools. In 1927, 80 % of indigenous

Fijian children were attending school, although rarely beyond four years. By 1931, most of the Methodist mission schools were handed over to local committees (Tavola, 1991, pp. 15-17) and these local school committees, formed by religious or cultural organizations, or out of traditional leadership groups, became an important part of the Fijian education system.

This history has resulted in a school system that is segregated in many ways. School committees with members recruited from community, church, and cultural organizations tend to be either exclusively Indian or exclusively Fijian. For example, a Muslim school will have committee members from the Muslim community and will therefore be predominantly Indian. Students can attend any school and therefore both Indian and Fijian students may attend the same school; however, schools are referred to by parents and students as an "Indian school" or a "Fijian school," based on the constituency of the school committee.

Despite the considerable involvement of local communities, up until 1968 the Fijian school system was still based on the British school system, both in structure and curriculum. Many of the teachers provided by the government came from overseas, mainly from England or New Zealand. There was little local input into what was taught in the schools as the curriculum was provided by the national government and imported, almost in its entirety, from England and New Zealand, teaching the Fijian students about a geography, history, biology, and society of which they had no experience (Whitehead, 1987). Ram, a Deputy Secretary of the Fiji Ministry of Education described how what was learned in school was removed from the real life of the students.

Studying a banana or a rice plantation or the way of life of the people of the South Pacific was not education then; it was too much a part of our life to be education. We learnt that Sheffield was famous for cutlery but we were not taught that there was a goldmine in Vatukoula. We read about the exploits of Perseus and King Arthur but there were no books available about the beautiful legends of the South Pacific. (1975, p. 24)

Besides the foreign facts that were part of the curriculum, the schools had a different culture with a different set of acceptable behaviours than those of the village.

Formal education ... has undermined established values and beliefs and created new ones which are often not in harmony with existing traditional systems. In schools, individuals are taught to stand up when an honoured visitor enters, while the traditional mode is for them to sit down. They are encouraged to be vocal and to question the authority of the senior members of the community, which is anathema in custom. (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 36)

In 1968, a curriculum reform was started and ten years of localised curriculum were completed by 1984 (Tavola, 1991, p. 43); however, the current Fijian education system continued to reflect a British influence, especially in the classroom culture.

### *Organization*

The formal school system is organized on a British model of twelve years of schooling, with examinations for promotion to the next level. Boarding schools are common especially in the rural communities. While there is a great deal of local control, the national government controls education through the Fiji Ministry of Education.

One of the obvious signs of British influence is the use of the term "class" for primary grades and "form" for secondary grades. However, in Fiji, there is not a simple progression from Class 1 through Class 6 and then on to Form 1 through 6.

In the 1960's, primary schools provided eight years of education (Class 1 to 8) and secondary schools provided four years of secondary education (Form 3 to 6) (Tavola,

2000d, p.29). The 1969 Royal Commission recommended a change to six years of primary (Class 1 to 6) and four years of secondary (Form 1 to 4) provided at Junior Secondary Schools. Qualifying students could then advance to two further years at a senior college. The Junior Secondary Schools were to be built throughout the rural areas and provide a practical curriculum for rural students (Tavola, 1991;36).

These reforms have not been successful. Responding to community pressure, many junior secondary school committees have gradually added Forms 5 and 6, focussing on an academic curriculum rather than vocational or agricultural curricula (Hindson, 1985, pp. 140-143). Consequently, there is an overlapping of the terms “class” and “form,” so that Class 7 and 8 corresponds to Form 1 and 2. Primary schools can teach up to Class 6 or Class 8. Students can go from Class 6 in a primary school to Form 1 in a secondary school. Or they can stay in a primary school up to Class 8 and then go on to Form 3 in a secondary school. Table 2 shows this school structure as well as the five external examinations set by the Ministry of Education (Tavola, 2000d, p. 30). The failure of this 1970’s reform is a further indication of the ability of local communities to change the Fijian education system to suit their own goals.

Most isolated schools provide schooling up to Class 8. Because Totoka is on an outlying island and has a school for Class 1 to 8, I will refer to Class 1 to 8 as primary education and Form 3 to 7 as secondary education.

Table 2 Progression of School Classes

Age	Year of schooling	Class	Form	Examination
6	1	1		
7	2	2		
8	3	3		
9	4	4		
10	5	5		
11	6	6		Fiji Intermediate Examination
12	7	7	1	
13	8	8	2	Fiji Eighth Year Examination
14	9		3	
15	10		4	Fiji Junior Certificate Examination
16	11		5	
17	12		6	Fiji School Leaving Certificate
18	13		7	Fiji Seventh Form Examination

For many Fijian adults, their experience was to leave their families when they were 6 years old, going with their older siblings and cousins to a school on a neighbouring island. Where transportation was slow or unreliable, these children would not return to their village or see their parents until the end of the term.

Although communities are encouraged to build their own schools, it is not feasible for every village to have a school within daily commuting distance. In many rural areas, both on small islands and in isolated valleys, children attend a boarding school starting

from Class 1, although with modern buses and outboard motors, they are often able to return home on the weekends. On an island in the same region as Totoka, a boarding school serves the four villages spread around the island. There are no roads, so while the children from the closest village can walk to school everyday, the other children go by boat. On Sunday afternoon, a boat will pick the children up and by the time it leaves the third village, it is crowded with children whose singing can be heard across the water (Journal entry).

Throughout Fiji, in order to reduce the costs of running the boarding schools, parents usually take turns doing the cooking for the children. Food is very basic; rice or cassava and lentil soup is common in many schools, although this would be similar to their basic diet at home. Students usually bring a bag of rice, cassava, or coconuts with them each Monday to be used through the week. Even fish is rare, as schools have no refrigeration and no one to catch fish during the week.

Some after-school supervision is provided by the teachers who lived in teachers' housing on the school grounds. But often it is the Head Boy and Head Girl, a senior student, who is in charge of the other students.

Fiji's education system is remarkable for its partnership between community and state. The community has a great deal of responsibility for education through school committees, but the state also contributes through the Ministry of Education in fairly substantial ways. The 1978 Education Act defines the following roles as responsibilities of the Ministry of Education (Tavola, 2000d, p.24):

- Administration and policy making,
- Registering and monitoring schools,



- Providing advisory services,
- Setting curriculum and designing materials,
- External examinations,
- Training, licensing, and employing teachers,
- Grants for tuition, buildings, and other purposes.

There is criticism about how well the ministry fulfills these duties (Bacchus, 2000a, p.369-388); however, of most interest to this study about the interactions between the school and the community are the problems with this partnership concerning the governance of schools. Whitehead is critical of this “voluntary control of schools” (1987, p. 90), particularly as it hinders the government’s abilities to determine education priorities. Tavola also finds that the partnership between community and government “is the root cause of the government’s inability to effectively control the education system” (1991, p. 153). Both Whitehead and Tavola agree that because it appears to be the most economical means of providing education in Fiji, the partnership between the Ministry of Education and school committees will continue.

### *School Committees*

As explained earlier in the history of education in Fiji, local school committees are an important feature of the Fijian education system. Of 715 primary schools in the country, only two schools are owned and managed by the government, 74% by local committees and the remainder by religious and cultural organizations or special education societies (Tavola, 2000d, p. 27). These committees vary in their structure, but their responsibilities are set out in the Education Act.

The composition of the school committee varies depending on the original purpose for the school. If the school was established and is funded by a religious or a cultural

organization, then the school committee members will be drawn from that organization. It is possible that there can be no parents on the school committee or that the community served by the school has no representation on the school committee at all. However, if the school was established by a village or several villages, then it is more likely that the entire school committee comes from the community, although not necessarily comprised of parents of children attending the school.

Reflecting the patriarchal nature of current Fijian society, very few women are represented on school committees. Helen Tavola, a Fijian researcher, recommends setting a minimum level of 30% representation by women on school committees (2000b, p. 261).

The role of the school committee is set out in the 1978 Education Act (Tavola, 2000d, p. 28). In general, a committee's responsibility is to manage the financial and physical resources of the school, which more specifically has come to mean the construction and maintenance of school buildings, including hostels and teachers' houses. The school committee is also responsible for the management of the grants received from the Ministry of Education for the purchase of textbooks, teachers' resources, and school supplies; however, most school committees find these funds insufficient for the running of a school. Many of their efforts therefore are directed towards fund-raising.

There are frequent stories in the Fiji newspapers about school fund-raisers, particularly the fairs in which students participate. These are often organized around school or community groups competing to raise the most money. Many of the fund-raising events involve the school alumnae, called Old Boys and Old Girls Clubs. A more simplified method of raising funds involves asking each student's family to donate a specified amount to the school.

## *Financing of Education*

Financing education in Fiji is the joint responsibility of the government and the school committees; however, community organizations, parents, and international aid agencies all contribute. There are no statistics on the breakdown of this joint financing, Whitehead estimates that in 1987 non-governmental contributions might have been 20% for primary education and up to 40% for secondary education (1987, p. 91).

Education in Fiji is officially free for the first 10 years of education. The government pays most teachers' salaries directly. Tuition grants are provided to primary schools based on size and to secondary schools based on a per student basis for Form 1 to 4 and to Form 5 for designated disadvantaged schools (Bacchus, 2000c, p.442). School committees can apply for government grants for building construction, libraries, textbooks, and transportation. Individual families can apply for government assistance for tuition fees for Form 5, 6, and 7 and for boarding fees.

As explained previously, the school committees are responsible for the school's financial management. Because they receive government tuition grants, school committees can not levy tuition fees but are allowed to collect textbook, building, activity, and other fees (Bacchus, 2000c, p. 444). While some school committees are able to finance the school through income from commercial properties, church donations (Tavola, 1991, p.89), or cultural organization funds, many committees, particularly in rural areas, depend on community fund-raising events to top-up the government grants. Despite the official policy of ten years of free education, Fijian families are still expected to contribute financially to their children's education.

In 1996, the Coordinating Committee for Children estimated that the cost to parents was \$150 to \$200 for each primary student and \$300 to \$450 for each secondary student (Save the Children Fund, 1998, p. 12-13). A newspaper story reported that the cost of sending a child to secondary school was more than \$200 per term (Fiji Post, June 29, 2000). This included buying school uniforms and paying school fees but did not include transportation costs or additional fund-raising expectations. The 1998 Fiji Bureau of Statistics reported that most rural Fijian families made less than \$4000 per year. With a cost of more than \$600 for three terms of a school year, a family could spend over 15% of its entire income on sending one child to secondary school. However in 1999, a single mother in Totoka who worked at the resort for \$50 a week and made about \$2500 a year, could spend almost one-quarter of her income to send her one daughter to secondary school.

The government, school committees, and individual families rely on aid from international agencies to cover the cost of education. The Ministry of Education receives development assistance from a number of countries as well as multilateral organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO. Some of this money goes to fund ministry initiatives such as curriculum development and some is re-directed to specific schools through grant programs (Bacchus, 2000c, p. 446-47).

School committees can apply to the Ministry of Education for these grants, but many school committees apply directly to government embassies located in Fiji or to international organizations such as the Rotary or Lions. Organizations such as Fiji Save the Children Fund and Fiji Council of Social Services help cover the costs of education

for students. Individual families can apply for assistance in paying school fees and transportation costs.

### *Curriculum*

This study does not include an intensive analysis of the curriculum, but there are topics that are important to explain briefly for background information. Issues of curriculum in Fiji are similar to those of other former colonies: academic versus vocational schooling, language of instruction, inclusion of local material including culture, and standardized testing.

Many developing countries face controversy about whether to provide an academic curriculum or a vocational education, often including agricultural subject matter. In 2000, Fiji was still in the midst of this debate as academics and planners lobbied for more relevant education for the subsistence, agricultural lifestyle that many rural students would return to after their education, while students and their families preferred an academic curriculum. This is an important debate that is discussed in more detail in a later chapter; a quick overview is presented here.

Fiji's official policy is ten years of education for everyone. This expectation that all students will go on to two years of secondary education means that primary schools focus on literacy and numeracy, preparing students to write the Intermediate and Eighth Year exams. Primary schools focus on the core subjects including English, Mathematics, Basic Science, Social Science and Health. While many schools have gardens that the students tend, there is not the focus on vocational education at the primary level that has been seen in some developing countries.

When students go on to secondary school, they have the choice of taking an academic or a vocational program. Some schools offer both, while other schools focus on one or the other. Although some choice is available, the majority of submissions to the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel comment that secondary schooling is too academic, with a focus on preparing students to enter university (Tavola, 2000c, p. 106). Recommendations for reform varies, but two themes are for a more liberal education preparing an all-round citizen with the “skills for life” (p.107) and preparing students to enter the workforce after school, learning a specific skill or a trade. Williams finds that “the skills recognised as being relevant and appropriate include those that are linked to tourism, fishing, motor mechanics, IT technology, agriculture, art, music, and sport” (2000, p. 213).

The official policy of the Ministry of Education is that the mother tongue (Hindi or Fijian) is the language of instruction for the first three years of education, with English being taught as a second language. Starting in Class 4, English officially becomes the language of instruction, with all standardized examinations, starting in Class 6, being written in English (Subramani, 2000a, p. 290).

In practice, few schools follow this policy. Most urban schools with a multi-lingual student population start in Class 1 teaching full-time in English, the common language for all students. Rural schools, where all the students speak a common language, tend to use that language as the main language of instruction throughout Class 1 to 8.

A further complication to the language policy is that it assumed a common Fijian language; however, there are 27 dialects across the country with considerable differences among them (Geraghty, 1984, p. 378). Mugler (1996, p. 279) notes that the differences

between a western dialect and *Bauan*, the official dialect from the east, is great enough for them to be considered two different languages. Unless teachers are from the local area, they speak a dialect different from that of their students, so their instruction is in *Bauan*, rather than the students' local dialect. All curriculum materials and the Fijian language test are in *Bauan*, so many Fijian students actually start learning *Bauan* in Grade 1 along with learning English.

At Totoka Village School, the students came to school speaking the local dialect, started learning *Bauan* and English in Class 1, and wrote tests in *Bauan* and English in Class 6. Like many rural Fijian schools, there was more Fijian spoken in the classrooms than English, even in Class 8. The situation in Totoka was somewhat unique in that three of the teachers spoke the local dialect. The teachers would say something in English, but then explain it in *Bauan* or the local dialect.

Fiji no longer uses the New Zealand curriculum in its schools and in 1989, a Fijian exam replaced the New Zealand School Leaving Certificate (Tavola, 2000d, p. 23). However, the curriculum still shows the influence of a colonial past.

The Institute of Education at the University of the South Pacific in Suva produces Fijian and English reading material written by local authors. But two of the books in use as core reading texts are, for secondary school children, *I Heard the Owl Call my Name*, the story of a new teacher in an isolated Canadian First Nations community, and *Swiss Family Robinson*, for Class 8. *Swiss Family Robinson* tells the story of an English family shipwrecked on an island. Perhaps this book was chosen because of the tropical island setting, but the island's inhabitants are referred to as savages and there are bears and

ostriches on the island, two animals foreign to Fijian children. Providing culturally appropriate materials is still a challenge in Fiji.

National standardized testing is a prevalent feature of Fijian education. The place of the five tests in the education system is shown in Table 2. All of the tests are written in English, except for the subjects of Fijian or Hindu. Fijian secondary schools use both the Fiji Intermediate and Fiji Eighth Year Examinations to screen prospective students. The Intermediate Exam written in the sixth year allows students to apply for places in secondary schools in Form 1. The Eighth Year Exam is used by most rural students to apply for Form 3. There is no official pass score for the exams, but secondary schools use the scores to select students. In Fiji, students are free to apply for any school in the country they wish to attend, regardless of geographic location, religious, or cultural designation. More importantly, they apply for schools according to their exam scores, with the most elite schools being able to set very high entrance requirements.

Testing was a major discussion issue with educators and a major concern for parents, students, and teachers. When I first met other researchers at the University of the South Pacific, one of them pointedly suggested that I should be researching the standardized exams and how to abolish them. The tests were attributed to limiting the type of teaching in the classroom, becoming the focus for the school year and being a false evaluation of schools, teachers, and students (Sadler, 2000, pp. 344-368).

### *Teachers*

Unlike many other developing countries, Fiji has a large corps of trained and relatively well-paid professional teachers. The majority of teachers in Fiji are trained



locally at one of the two Teachers' Colleges in Fiji or at the University of the South Pacific. They are paid by the government and so are considered civil servants, a position that provides both respect and security. There are opportunities through the Ministry of Education for professional development, many programs are sponsored by aid agencies such as UNICEF's Basic Education and Literacy Program and the Fiji Australia Basic Education Management and Teacher Upgrading Project.

Especially in the rural areas, teachers are regarded with respect: they are often the only persons in the community with post-secondary education, they are employed by the government, receive a regular wage in a subsistence community, and they fit easily into the hierarchical structure of traditional Fiji society. This standing in the community often puts them in positions of community leadership as illustrated in Community Education: Project Reports (Kedrayate, 1997), where many of the project leaders were either teachers or enlisted a teacher as a main supporter of the project.

Teachers are placed by the Ministry of Education and usually have no say in where they are sent. This means, that in the rural areas, the teachers are often not from the community or even the region. They are unfamiliar with the local dialect, local culture, and living conditions.

At one school that I visited, the Class 7 teacher was from the island of Rotuma, 465 kilometres from the main island of Fiji, part of Fiji politically, but very distinct linguistically and culturally. This teacher could only speak English to his students since he did not speak Fijian. The same would be true for most Indo-Fijian teachers placed in a Fijian school or vice versa. Another young teacher, placed in a school on an outer island,

grew up in an urban area and was afraid of travelling by boat, severely limiting her visits back to her family and attendance at training workshops.

Rural schools provide teachers' housing, but the conditions are considered so primitive that most teachers apply for urban postings as soon as they have served a requisite number of years at a rural school. The turnover of staff in rural schools is often high (Coxon, 2000a, pp. 389-424).

The Head Teacher is responsible for the school and the school staff, working with the school committee and the Ministry of Education (Bacchus, 2000a, pp.386-388). In larger schools, the Head Teacher might be assisted by a school manager who looks after the administrative duties and an executive teacher who is responsible for educational leadership. However, in small primary schools the Head Teacher will take on those duties as well as teaching full time.

Fiji has a good education system as indicated by high enrolment rates and high levels of literacy, in comparison to other developing countries and other Pacific Island Countries (UNDP, 1999; UNICEF, 1999). Despite the fact that compulsory attendance for ages six to fifteen was only gradually introduced starting in 1997, and that this policy is not enforced (Tavola, 2000d, p. 30), school enrolment in Fiji is very high. In 1999, the Ministry of Education reported that 98% of primary-aged children were enrolled in school (Coxon, 2000b, p.74).

This overview of the country of Fiji presents a country with many natural resources and a well-educated population with strong ties to its traditional culture. The education system has been influenced by the British colonial power and continues to be organized

in a similar manner. I turn now to describe the community of Totoka, where this study was located.

## **Totoka**

A case study must include a description of the research site, to set the context for the research, providing support for the validity as well as the limitations of the findings. The larger context of the culture and society of Fiji has been described in the previous section. Following is a description of the specific island and villages where this research was conducted, based on what I learned about the community while I lived there. Some information is purposefully vague so that the specific community can not be easily identified. I have attempted to present the details needed by the reader to understand the study while protecting the anonymity of the study participants.

### *The Island*

Totoka Island was a small island, an hour and a half by motor boat from the “mainland,” the main island of Fiji. On the side of the island facing the mainland were a village and a backpackers resort. A three-hour hike over the hills or a 20 minute boat-ride was needed to get to the other side of the island where there were two villages and the school. About 400 people in all resided on the island, although many relatives lived on other islands, the mainland, and even overseas.

Due to a natural disaster the government moved the original village and the school across the island. The villagers gradually returned to their original houses and plantations in the “old village,” but the two new villages on the other side of the island grew as the

population increased. During the time of the study, many families moved during the school year between their house in the old village and another house closer to the school.

The three villages were built along beaches that provided good boat access and anchorage. Each village had a large, concrete church and several open spaces for gatherings. The houses were scattered two or three deep along the beach and were either traditional thatched *bures* or newer style homes with tin roofs over concrete block or wooden walls. They all had a similar, traditional layout: one large room with an outside door on each of three walls and one or two bedrooms on the fourth wall, separated by a wall or sometimes by a curtain. There were usually separate smaller buildings for the cooking shelter, shower, and toilet. Through a system of holding tanks and pipes, water from the high hills was piped to the villages, the resort, and the school to be used for cooking and washing. There were flush toilets at the resort and at the school. Some villagers had also built flush toilets along side their houses.

Cooking was often done on a wood fire, although kerosene cookers were common and there were some gas stoves that made baking easier. The wood was gathered in the hills; kerosene and gas was bought on the mainland. Kerosene lanterns were usually lit in the evenings, although some families had generators that provided light for several houses if there was money to buy diesel or benzine. There was no refrigeration.

Fijians ate, worked, and visited sitting on the floor, which was covered by a number of large mats woven by the women of the family. If a family could afford it, there may have been a sofa and chairs, but these were seldom used except to be offered to guests. On the walls, there were often photographs of family members that tourists had taken and mailed back to Fiji.

As important as the land where they lived and farmed were the waters and reefs around the island. The men went out by boat to the off-shore reefs to hunt larger fish by spear or catch small fish by net closer to shore. Women and children used hand-lines to catch small reef fish close to shore. At low tide, the reef that surrounded the island was exposed and women and children would gather octopus, shell-fish, and crabs.

Since Totoka was a small island, transportation was by foot or by boat; there were no roads. Villagers were often seen walking to their gardens or around the island to another village. Boats were an important commodity, providing transportation but also used for fishing. There were some canoes made of roofing tin used for fishing close to shore, but most were larger boats with outboard motors. The resort had two large boats that provided transportation to the mainland once a day. Tourists, who were charged \$60 per trip, got first priority, but if there was room, locals could pay \$5. Women would take the trip in to go shopping. Orders for food and fuel could also be given to the boat captain to be filled.

While not totally isolated, there were limited communications to and from the mainland. There was one radio telephone at the resort that was available to the villagers for a small fee when the office was open and if a tourist was not using it. Mail had to be posted and picked up on the mainland. People had battery-operated radios and could receive several Fijian stations, listening mostly to news and religious programs. There were some TV sets, but only the village on the mainland side of the island could receive the local TV station. Otherwise TV's were used for watching videos.

Fiji has five national newspapers - three in English, one in Fijian, and one in Hindi - all available on the mainland. When someone splurged and spent the 60 cents for the

paper, it was passed on to many people to read. Once, I returned from the mainland with a paper in hand. When I stopped at the store at the resort, the clerk pointed out that a young man had been following me throughout the resort, too shy to ask if he could read my paper. When I gave it to him, both he and the clerk immediately spread it out on the floor to read, starting with the rugby news.

### *A Traditional Community*

The people of Totoka, who were all Indigenous Fijian, were not totally isolated from the wider Fijian society or even from the larger world. With the numbers of tourists that visited the island, they perhaps had more global connections than many other Fijians. Nevertheless, they still maintained many of the Fijian traditions. A visiting teacher who lived on the mainland and was from a very isolated group of islands made the comment that the people of Totoka were more traditional than her village, keeping with the formalities of even everyday rituals. This is not to imply that the island was not changing and adopting modern conveniences and possessions, but that the people of Totoka had managed to maintain many of their traditions through a period of change.

The indigenous values of Pacific cultures identified by Hau'ofa (1985) and discussed in the previous section were identifiable in the everyday life on Totoka: group interest, sharing of goods and services, sense of place and social continuity, intimacy in interpersonal relationships, oral traditions, self-sufficiency and self-reliance, caring for members of the society, arts and entertainment integrated into community life. The stories below illustrate each of these values as acted out in the community of Totoka.

Group interest came before the rights of the individual. The resort was owned communally by the *mataqalis* on the island. Individual workers were paid a wage, but the profits were shared amongst the villages. After the coup in 2000, the number of tourists dropped, reducing the resort's income. The workers were asked to work for free to keep the resort open until the situation improved. Everyone continued working and did not receive wages for several weeks. The interest of the group-owned resort took precedence over the interests of individual workers.

An accumulation of goods was shared, as were services. Every day, dishes of extra food would be sent from house to house. One day, I was with a group of women, playfully teasing a group of men butchering a goat. As I announced my intention to leave, a leg of the goat was handed me to take back to my *bure*, which my host cooked and proceeded to share with other families. After her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, which was an important event, a young woman proceeded to give away almost all of her presents, the dresses, pots and pans, and perfume, keeping only a couple of items for herself. Money was also shared; as the story of the man who gave away almost half of his pension pay-out shows.

There was a strong sense of place and the social continuity of that place, which included ancestors as well as future generations. One of the old men told the story of building a school on the island when he was younger. The place he had chosen was *tabu* because it was the cemetery, so he told all of the children to meet him on the beach below the cemetery. He arrived with a whale's tooth to formally ask the ancestors to allow the school to be built on their resting ground. The old man laughed as he recounted the story and how the ancestors could not refuse a traditional request; the school was built on the cemetery land.

Many gravesites were placed right beside family homes. When enough money was saved, a raised cement pad would be poured over the grave. This was a common place for people to sit as they visited or rested. One man would say that he was going to talk to his mother and would go to sit quietly on her grave, resting one hand lovingly on the cement.

Intimacy in interpersonal relationships was common for the people of Totoka, whether the relationship was social or economic. The relationships were often based on kinship and many marriages on the island were between the different *mataqali* on the island or those on neighbouring islands. One day, there were a number of young men whom I did not recognize mowing the schoolyard. The grass had not been mowed for a long time and the young men who came over from the village every evening to play rugby had been running through knee-high grass. The head teacher told me that she had asked for help from a village on the next island and they could not refuse because they were related to her. I did not understand why she could not ask the young men on the island who were her cousins and nephews. The interrelationships, as well as the restrictions and consequences of asking favours, were too complicated for me to understand fully - even in the almost two years that I lived in the community.

Oral traditions were important on Totoka and were reinforced by many evening sessions telling stories around the *kava* bowl. The oral history included a story of how the different *mataqali* came to settle on the island and another of how they avoided a measles epidemic through the leadership and prayer of their elders. As Hau'ofa explains (1985, pp. 157-158), an oral tradition does not place an emphasis on the facts of the story which can be changed over time. This became evident to me as I tried to learn how the school generator was paid for, a seemingly straightforward fact. I was told various stories



involving different school chairmen, different committees, different amounts of money, and different donations from tourists.

The people of Totoka pride themselves on their self-sufficiency and self-reliance. For many years profits from the resort had provided them with housing, employment, and money for special school functions. When tourism dropped dramatically after the coup and the resort was losing money, I asked them what they would do. While they appreciated that they would not have cash for luxuries, many people told me that they would go back to fishing and farming which would provide them with the necessities.

All members of the community were cared for by the community. Children wandered freely, being watched over by everyone and often fed in whatever home they found themselves at mealtime. Old men and women were cared for by their children and grand-children. A man who had been badly injured falling out of a coconut tree as a young boy held one of the most stable positions at the resort. Single mothers would often move back to the village with their children to live with their parents.

There was not a clear division between work and leisure on Totoka, or in Hau'ofa's words "arts and entertainments were integrated into community life" (1985, p. 105). One of the *mataqali* heads was having his traditional *bure* rebuilt. The task took place over a week. One day, I would walk by and see the older men sitting in a group, weaving the coconut fronds for the roof or the bamboo walls, the young men up on the roof preparing the thatch, with lots of banter and joking going on back and forth. The next day I would find them sitting together having tea with groups of people that had brought tribute for the new *bure*. Every evening was filled with story-telling around the *kava* bowl. The task

was completed, but a great deal of visiting, eating, and story-telling occupied as central a role as the actual building.

In some ways, gender roles were strictly defined in the society: men worked the plantations and women did the housework, men drank *kava* together while the women drank tea. But I found that the Fijians' practical nature often bent the rules as they had been told to me. I saw men wash clothes and women serve *kava*. The holders of formal power on the island, however, were all male: the school committee, the resort board of directors, the heads of the *mataqalis*, the mayors of the villages. There were a number of strong, influential women on the island, but their participation in the male dominated committees and structures was limited. For example, the Head Teacher was a strong female leader; however, she sent the male teacher to the school committee meetings.

The Methodist church was very important to Fijians on the island of Totoka. Each village was proud to have its own concrete church building. Their religion was more than an hour on Sunday; if possible, people would attend two or three services on Sunday and a bible study during the week. Sunday was reserved for church and so there were no other activities: no fishing, no swimming, no volleyball, no rugby, no boat travel. Again, the practical nature of Fijians allowed for some work such as cooking for the tourists and a boat would be hired to transport a visiting minister to the next village. But the resort boat did not run to the mainland and there were no diving or tourist trips on Sunday. While the school on Totoka was not a church-run school, as many in Fiji were, the students still opened their days with hymns and prayers. Often the only reading material found in a home was the bible and a hymnbook.

### *Traditional Political Organization*

The people on the island each belonged to one of three *mataqalis*, land-owning clans recognized and defined by the government. People's allegiance, however, tended to be to their extended family, the *tokatoka*, rather than the *mataqali*. As a result there was some confusion over how many *mataqalis* there were on the island, as the name of one *tokatoka* was also given by several community members as a *mataqali*.

There was a head of each *mataqali* and *tokatoka*, as well as a chief for the entire island, all men in this case, providing leadership and making decisions for their extended family. For example, one head decided that no one in his *mataqali* should be drinking alcoholic beverages, and for the most part, this decree was followed. Leadership was not questioned outright, although individuals had a fair bit of freedom to make their own decisions. One evening, a group of male leaders decided that a planned school field trip to the mainland should not take place, but the mothers who had organized the event went ahead and held the field trip as planned.

Each village had members from all three *mataqalis*, although based on the numbers of members in the village, each village had a dominant *mataqali*. Each village also had one head of either a *mataqali* or a *tokatoka* who acted as leader of that village. With intermarriage between families and movement between family houses in different villages, there was a mixture of the *mataqali* and *tokatoka* in each village.

While the chief was accorded respect and deference appropriate to his position, the *Turaga ni Koro* was the spokesman for the chief and looked after the administration of the island. This position was chosen by the island leaders but was actually a government appointment with a small stipend.

Formal leadership continued to be held by the oldest members of the community. One day, a couple was getting ready to attend the Methodist Youth meeting. I was surprised since they were both almost 40 years old! Some people talked to me about the need for more of the educated men to take on leadership roles, but most of these more educated men were still considered youth by the community.

### *Economic Activities*

As in most of the outlying Fijian islands, the major economic activity was subsistence farming and fishing, supplemented by income from selling crafts or performing for tourist groups. A major difference in Totoka's economic situation was the income from the community-owned backpackers resort.

The backpackers resort on the island was unique at the time in that it was owned and managed by the villagers. There were other resorts in Fiji that were owned by individual Fijians and operated as private businesses. There were other resorts that were owned by villages but had a manager from overseas. At Totoka there was no foreign investment, affiliation with a foreign-owned resort, or ex-patriats working at the resort. The board of directors was made up of men from the island, many of whom were retired from working on the mainland in positions that gave them experiences in Western-style business management.

The resort was a major source of cash economy for the island as almost all of the staff were from the villages or were relatives from the mainland. As well as the regular staff, many village men were hired on a casual basis for building projects, guiding, or for boat transportation. The resort bought produce and fish from the villagers. The members

of the *meke* (dance) group were paid for their entertainment during a resort-sponsored trip to the village and women earned money by selling handicrafts to the tourists.

The profits from the resort were used for village projects. In one year, 3 new houses were built in each village, paid for by the resort. The resort gave money to the school as it was requested for special projects such as \$2000 for a fund-raising event and \$500 for a bus for the school trip. The board gave a scholarship to a young man who had been working in the resort office to study hotel management at the Fiji Institute of Technology.

The resort was also a major source of contact between the villagers and people from around the world. Since it was a backpackers resort, most of the tourists were under 30, dressing and acting in ways that were uncommon in a traditional, Fijian village. They exhibited body-piercing, no family responsibilities, blatant flirting, and wore bikinis.

Although the resort provided a cash wage for some, the livelihood for most villagers was subsistence farming and fishing. Root crops, fruit, and vegetables were grown in gardens around their homes and up in the hills. Fish were caught right from shore as well as on the reefs further off the island. Shellfish were found on the beaches around the island. Some pigs, chickens, goats, and cows were raised, although these meats were usually reserved for special feasts. Store goods were bought on the mainland supplemented by family-run, small canteens where powdered milk, sugar, tea, canned meat, instant noodles, cigarettes, and candies could be purchased.

Every family had access to some cash income from working at the resort, selling handicrafts to the tourists, performing traditional dances for the tourists, or selling produce and fish to the resort or in the market on the mainland. Besides cash for store goods, benzine for the boats and kerosene for light and cooking, families needed cash for

school fees, church donations, and expenses for funerals, weddings, and other celebrations.

### *Totoka Village School*

The primary school provided education from Class 1 to 8 for 80 island children. There were four teachers who each taught about 20 children in multi-grade classes. Children from the village on the other side of the island lived with relatives near the school during the week. Students went on to secondary school on the mainland where they lived at a boarding school or with relatives.

There was a high enrolment rate in Totoka. Compulsory education up to age 15 had only recently been implemented in Fiji and there was no system of enforcement in place; nevertheless, there were only three boys of primary school age on the island who did not attend school. Two were about 12 years of age, did not do well in school, did not want to go to school and their parents had stopped forcing them to go. The third was severely disabled. Of the 10 children who sat the Class 8 exam in my first year there, eight passed and went on to secondary school on the mainland. The other two repeated Class 8.

A kindergarten had been set up in a vacant teacher's house. The Head Teacher's twenty year-old daughter taught it on a volunteer basis, although sometimes she received a stipend from the resort or the cruise ship line. There was a mother's club that raised some funds for the kindergarten, maintained the building and organized special events. The government would not accredit the kindergarten until there was an appropriate building with an enclosed playground. The Head Teacher and I speculated that the policy of an enclosed playground was important on the mainland where schools were beside

roads and the fence would protect the children from the traffic. The policy seemed to make little sense on the island, where there was only a footpath beside the kindergarten.

This primary school was a Grant-in-Aid school, managed by a local committee with funding from the government. The government paid for the teachers' salaries as well as giving a grant of \$30 per pupil per term for school supplies. Students at this school paid \$5 per term in school fees. The local school committee was responsible for school maintenance as well as raising further funds for the school through fundraising activities, tourist donations, and international aid projects. These funds helped pay for the school verandah, water tanks, a photocopier, a diesel generator, and a lawn mower. The chair of the school committee rotated among the three villages yearly and the chair then chose his committee members. In the past, the chairman and all of the school committee members have always been men. There was also a Parent-Teacher's Association (PTA) that was responsible for raising funds for school materials other than the facilities. The PTA appeared to be inactive during the research period.

This section has given a description of the villages and school on the island of Totoka, where this study was conducted. While maintaining a very traditional lifestyle, the people in the village were also adapting to many changes. Most families relied on traditional economic practices of subsistence farming and fishing, but the villages owned and operated a successful tourist resort. The people of Totoka were exposed to Western culture through TV, magazines, and contact with tourists and yet maintained their traditional cultural practices. Education and the Totoka Village School were a part of both the traditions of the island as well as the change. The next chapters will examine the relations between the community of Totoka and the school.

## **5. EDUCATION'S ROLE IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

In this chapter, I examine how well the theory that education is important for economic and social development (Gannicott, 1990; Hallak, 1990; Lynch, 1997) fits the lives of the people of Totoka. In Chapter 2, the importance of this theory in international development literature was presented. It carries the assumption that if parents do not support the education of their children they must not understand the role of education in the economic and social development of their children and their community. Initially in this chapter, I establish that the people of Totoka did indeed value education and wanted their children to attend and succeed at school. However, my observations show that a large number of community children did not attend secondary school. I argue that the people of Totoka had a pragmatic understanding of the role of education in economic and social development and this understanding influenced how they interacted with the school.

Looking first at the role of education in the economic development of individuals, families and the community of Totoka, my analysis shows that the people of Totoka valued education for its potential benefits but that educational decisions were made within a broader context than the individual's life. In the predominantly subsistence farming and fishing economy of Totoka, relationships were the basis for economic security. Status and traditions were what upheld and strengthened the relationships. I show most people preferred academic curricula, not only for the job benefits, but because it increased status while maintaining relationships and traditions.

Similarly, education's role in social development in the community of Totoka was limited to how it supported relationships, status, and traditions. As presented in the



literature review, education is expected to result in two contradictory purposes, initiating change while at the same time maintaining culture and language. The interviews that I present in this chapter reveal the dilemmas faced by the people of Totoka as they struggled to maintain their traditions while accepting the changes that education could bring to improve their lives.

### **Positive Attitudes Towards Education**

The literature review in Chapter 2 presented a common assumption that educational problems are rooted in the home environment and particularly in parents' poor attitudes towards education. This assumption was accepted by many Fijian educators and policy makers. Seven months after the attempted coup, *The Blueprint for Affirmative Action on Fijian Education* was produced by the Minister of Education (2000), who had been appointed by the Interim government. This government was generally perceived as preserving Fiji for indigenous Fijians and strongly supported policies of maintaining indigenous Fijian culture. A part of the mission statement in this blueprint is "To inculcate into Fijian parents the understanding that education is the key to success in life and to therefore place the education of their children highest on their list of priorities" (p. 4). Even Fijians who were politically committed to the strength and validity of the Fijian culture believed that Fijian parents did not hold proper attitudes towards the education of their children.

Teachers at Totoka School also accepted that poor parental attitudes were responsible for educational problems. A young teacher who was from the mainland attributed the parents' attitudes to life in the village, where education may not be

necessary for economic survival. I asked her what made a difference in student achievement.

Vini: Parents' attitude towards education. They are brought up in a village. They don't think education is important. They have everything they need. So if their children don't do well in school they can farm and fish.

The Head Teacher also felt that the people of Totoka did not have a proper attitude towards education. She compared the people of Totoka to another group of islands in Fiji, Lau, the home of many national political figures.

Esiteri: Especially for the people from Lau, education is a priority. They are struggling [i.e., working hard to improve their education], but for us [Totoka] people, they just relax. They are not concerned. They just accept what they get.

Both of these teachers felt that parents and other community members had a poor attitude and did not understand the value of education. They both ascribed this attitude to the ability to live off the land, fishing and farming, and to accepting "what they get."

Mareta, who had taught for a number of years in Totoka, also felt adults lacked positive attitudes towards education, particularly community members who were older and had less education.

Mareta: They neglect [education]. They don't see it as important. Young couples do better. Older people are careless. Their level of education is different.

She went on to say that as a result of these poor attitudes, the people of Totoka were not taking on their duties and responsibilities as parents.

Mareta: The problem still lies in each person's attitude and the way they see education. If only someone could educate them to see education as a source of - - I don't know what.

Mareta felt that parents were shirking their responsibilities because they did not see the benefits of education. Her frustration comes through in this quote as she tries to search for something that would make the villagers value education. It is interesting that even Mareta, a well-educated Fijian teacher who was familiar with the community, had difficulty explaining why education should be valued. She agreed with the assumption that people should value education but was not clear why they should.

Certainly, teachers at the school, especially those from the community and those who had been in the community for a long period, should have had a good understanding of some of the causes of the problems with education in the community. However, discussions with community members raised questions as to whether a poor attitude towards education was a major factor in community-school relations.

During interviews, parents and other community members voiced their support for education, recognizing how education could benefit their children, their family, and even their entire community. They valued education for a variety of reasons: increased financial resources, increased status, better decision-making in the community. Even some elders who criticized the school system still supported education.

Every parent that I interviewed expressed the wish that all of their children would do well in school, continuing on to secondary school, even though that meant leaving the village. They had dreams of their children becoming teachers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, and pilots. Young adults talked about how their parents had encouraged them to continue in school. Liviana was a young woman from the village who worked in a factory on the mainland. I talked to her one day when she was visiting her parents. She had gone to the mainland for Form 3 but did not continue on in her education.

- Marilyn: What did your parents say when you said you didn't want to go to Form 4?
- Liviana: They wanted to push me up to secondary to get a good job. But they told me "It's up to you." So now, I end up in the garment factory.
- Marilyn: What should parents do to support their children's education?
- Liviana: Tell them to go to school. I will tell them to go until Form 6 or 7.
- Marilyn: What if they say no?
- Liviana: No. I have to push them because of how I end up. Have to think of their future.

Although she didn't finish secondary school, it is clear that her parents supported her education and she herself believes that her own children should stay in school. With nine years of education, Liviana had a wage job on the mainland and was contributing money to her family, but she wanted her children to finish secondary school. Even though her job provided her with a cash income, it did not hold the status of a job that required Form 6 and a Fiji School Leaving Certificate.

A high level of education provided more than a better paying job, it also provided a certain amount of status, not just for the individual but for their family. One of the men on the island, Kaliopate, proudly told me that his brother had been to University<sup>9</sup>.

- Marilyn: Why did your brother go on to get a university degree?
- Kaliopate: We promised that one son or daughter would raise up our grandfather's name.

It is important that Kaliopate did not mention the job that his brother was able to get because of his education or a resulting salary, but only mentioned the fact that his brother has a University degree, an education that "raised up" or brought status to his grandfather's name. While Kaliopate only had eight years of schooling, his brother's higher education raised the status of the entire family.

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<sup>9</sup> This was the only person from the island that I heard of who had been to University. While a University program was available in Fiji, the teachers on the island had all gone to teachers' college, which was also highly regarded.

Kaliopate also talked about the importance of education for the entire community.

Kaliopate had recently been appointed to a leadership position in the community and we were talking about what he hoped to achieve while he was in the position.

Marilyn: Are there things you know already that you want to do?

Kaliopate: The big difference when you just stay here.... You can learn more. When you go to Suva you can see a new thing.

Marilyn: You would like to see some changes?

Kaliopate: Yes. Some just up to Class 4 - just like a lantern; some Class 8 - like a Coleman, Form 4 is electricity.

Marilyn: So you think education is good for the village?

Kaliopate: Yes. Good for everything. The brain is mature.

Most people in the village burned kerosene lanterns; the fuel was inexpensive but they smelled and did not give off much light, especially for some activities like reading. Those families that could afford it bought Coleman lanterns which gave off a bright light. But every family's dream was to buy a generator so that they could have electricity in their homes for TV's and radios as well as lights. Kaliopate likens ten years of education (Form 4) to electricity, whereas four years of school (Class 4) would be as poor quality as a kerosene lantern. Kaliopate did not talk about the specific skills that education provided such as speaking English or vocational skills, but how education developed the whole person, opening them up to a world beyond the village. He also valued the "maturity" that education brought to the entire community. Education was valued in and of itself, separate from the economic benefit of a job secured through further education.

In some interviews, people in the village told me some people, particularly the older men, did not support education and this negative attitude affected the village support of education. But they also assured me that they themselves saw the benefits of education and wanted their children to go to school. It was possible that they were telling me that they supported education because they thought that was the answer for which I was

looking. It was important to look for other expressions of a positive attitude towards education to support their verbal statements.

School enrollment corroborated the verbal expressions of support for education. In my two years of data collection, there were only three children of primary school age who were not going to school and one of those was severely disabled. Using a school-age population<sup>10</sup> on the island of 83, this showed an enrolment rate of 96%. During my two years on the island, only one of the 20 students graduating from Class 8 did not go on to secondary school. Parents felt that education was important, sending their children to the school in the village and on to secondary school on the mainland. It was not true that children were absent from school because the community did not believe in formal education.

Interviews with some male elders on the island confirmed, however, that there were people in the community that were not totally supportive of the education system as it was. These men, who were influential heads of extended families, talked about how education brought change to the village. One of them, Iliesa, was the *Turaga ni Kororo* and responsible for organizing village communal work. He was 63 and had six years of formal education.

Marilyn: What changes do you see in the young people?

Iliesa: In the olden days, young people, whatever they were told, they had to do it. Now it's very difficult. Don't listen.

Marilyn: Is the school part of that change?

Iliesa: Yes. Education means boys and girls get a good education and don't want to follow what the headman says. Education brings bad ideas and good ideas. Education changes village life. The school educates the child who can then go to further education. But, one boy goes to

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<sup>10</sup> There were 80 children going to Totoka Village School, but there were some village children who went to school on the mainland after Class 6.

learn and doesn't want to teach others, but keeps it for himself. Tries to trick us with new ideas. They get a good job. When they come back, they do some things not good for the village; help only themselves.

These elders saw the benefits of education, but they also saw the negative changes that education brought to the villages. They were concerned about the loss of language, the loss of traditional culture, and the loss of respect for elders, especially the respect for the traditional leadership in the village. They attributed some of these changes to formal education.

A statement by Sefanaia, who was 65, had eight years of schooling, and was on the resort board of directors, suggests the tension between seeing the benefits of education as well as the negative aspects.

Sefanaia: Everything is changing in the mind of the young people, especially the culture. The school and the church come and try their best to swing the people. ... Change is very strong indeed and the school is a part of that. Yes, school is good. But on the other side [it's not good]. I'm talking about culture.

Perhaps more than any other segment of the population, the older men in the village who were in traditional leadership roles were concerned about the negative changes that education brought. In a society where relationships and hierarchical traditions are important, these elders would be most aware of how education must fit into those traditions. But even as they questioned some of the results of education, especially the erosion of traditions, these male leaders still admitted, "school is good."

Another indication of the support of education was parents' willingness to pay school fees and expenses. While primary school was inexpensive, as explained in Chapter 4, sending a child to secondary school could require 15-25% of a family's cash income. Nevertheless, parents expressed their willingness to find ways to pay school fees, often

asking family members who had wage employment to contribute. In every interview, parents identified paying fees as one of their main roles in supporting their children's education. Many of them explained the difficulties in raising the money, but not one said that their child would have to drop out of school because they could not pay the fees. Instead they indicated that they would find a way to pay the fees because they wanted their children to finish secondary school.

The general attitude of the people of Totoka towards education was very positive. They spoke about their hopes for their children's education. Enrollment in the primary grades was high, as was enrollment in the first year of secondary school on the mainland. If a positive attitude by parents towards education was enough to ensure the success of education in a community, Totoka would not have had any problems.

The story of Seona and her family illustrates how attitude alone does not determine school enrollment. Seona was in her early thirties with twelve years of education, very active at Totoka Village School, and with a strong belief in how education could benefit her children. She had worked in tourism and her English was very good. She was the volunteer health worker for the village, dispensing pain tablets and bandages. Her husband, a carpenter, often worked off the island, raising money to support their family of eight children. Seona's house was one of the few houses in the village where I saw reading material. There were health information posters up on the walls and Seona had a small library of books that tourists had given her to read. One evening I stopped by the house to find the floor covered with children ready for sleep, listening intently to the book that Seona was reading to them. All of Seona's school-age children had a good command of the English language and were often the first children to approach tourists to



talk to them. Her children often collected the prizes at the end of the year for the best marks.

The twins, Mitieli and Susana, did well in school, although Mitieli struggled with his homework; he preferred to be out fishing. After Class 8 they were excited, although nervous, about going to the mainland for Form 3 at the Catholic Boarding School. Seona proudly related the following story to me. One day during school break when the children were home from school, Mitieli, the oldest boy, had caught a large fish for the family's dinner. She teased him that next year he would have to stay home and fish for the family. He said no; he was going to school. "Yes, good for you!" Seona had told him. Seona was very proud of Mitieli for his fishing abilities, but even prouder that he wanted to continue his education.

Seona had a very positive attitude towards education, having had a good experience in school herself and believing in the opportunities it would give to her children. This attitude was passed on to her children, most of whom succeeded in school. Her oldest girl, however, returned to the village after one year in secondary school and stayed at home looking after the children, sometimes getting work at the resort. After leaving Fiji, I received a letter from Seona, informing me that Mitieli was at home, farming and fishing. And this was a common problem in Totoka. Encouraged and supported by their parents, almost every student went on to secondary school, but many left during the first or second year. Enrollment rates dropped dramatically once the children left the local school and went on to secondary school on the mainland or another island. Of the 36 families interviewed, nine of the twenty-four children of secondary-school age were not attending

school. That is, there was only 62% attendance from the island in secondary school, lower than the national statistics for rural or Fijian children.

There was no question that there were problems with relations between the school and the community of Totoka. I will describe these problems in detail in the next sections on economic and social development. However, the analysis of the community presented in this chapter indicates that failure to believe in the value of education does not appear to be the reason for these problems. The teachers' willingness to place the blame on a poor attitude by community members appears to be based on acceptance of the theory presented by many educators that if community members do not support education as it is given to them then those community members do not have a proper understanding of the benefits of education. Many programs that are designed to strengthen the interactions between school and community have a component with a purpose to improve the community's attitude towards education.

This study of the community of Totoka shows that attempts to improve community attitudes would be misplaced since community attitudes are already very positive. Instead the question to be asked is why would Seona, herself well educated and with a positive attitude towards education, allow her eldest daughter and her son to leave school after Class 8? The theory that poor parental attitudes are the cause of students dropping out of school does not explain why Seona, who valued education and encouraged her children, would have children like Mitieli and Kuini leaving school after Class 8. It appeared that a poor attitude by parents towards education was not why students dropped out of school. I propose another reason why the people of Totoka let their children leave school before finishing: their understanding of the role of education in their economic livelihood.

## **Economic Development and Education**

In this section, I present a way to understand this behaviour by looking at the kind of education that parents in Totoka want for their children. This analysis provides some insight into the role that the people of Totoka believed education had in their lives, particularly the economics of their family and their community. The preference that Totoka parents had for academic credentials over vocational training indicates that the status gained from academic education was of greater importance than the jobs that would be available after vocational training. The role they believed education had in their economic development was different than the role for which educators planned. This is due to an economic system that is based on status, relationships and traditions rather than the impersonal exchange of goods, services and money.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 presented the theory that education plays a role in economic development. This theory is used by international agencies and national ministries of education to determine education policies, particularly curriculum policies that attempt to prepare students for wage employment after finishing secondary school. A common trend is the promotion of vocational programs based on the theory that education can directly improve the economic situation of individuals and therefore the economic development of communities and even of entire countries.

The assumption is often made that vocational or agricultural education is more appropriate than an academic education for communities that are based on a subsistence lifestyle. These assumptions are present in the literature and in Fijian educational policies (for a thorough discussion of these policies in the South Pacific see Gannicott, 1990). But these assumptions did not match the expectations that the people of Totoka had of

education. People who lived in Totoka and even those community members who lived on the mainland believed that living in the village constituted a good life. Parents, however, wanted their children to have the opportunity to continue on in school and gain the status and increased resources that came with an academic education. Rather than preparing individuals for the workforce, an academic education would provide some members of the family with a higher status and a resulting wider access to resources that benefitted the entire family.

### *People's Expectations of Education*

The people of Totoka did appreciate vocational skills, especially traditional skills such as gardening and weaving but also skills related to wage employment<sup>11</sup>. They thought that young people should learn these skills, in school if necessary. But when specifically asked about the kind of education they wanted for their own children, without question or qualification parents specified academic programs. Trying to understand this contradiction provides answers to how education benefitted Fijian families.

Seriana was a single mother, who completed Form 6 at the island secondary school in an agricultural program and went on to work at the resort. Her interview reflects the importance placed on traditional skills such as weaving and building the *lovo*, the earth oven used for feasts. Her view was common: that these skills should be taught in the home, but if they are not, the school should fill that role.

Marilyn: What subjects were important in secondary school?  
Seriana: English, Maths, Science.

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<sup>11</sup> The wage jobs that people from Totoka had were in tourism, teaching, government, the Fiji Pine Company, and some garment work.

- Marilyn: I read that there should be more Arts and Crafts to preserve Fijian culture.
- Seriana: Painting was a waste. Weaving was good; it's not learned at home. Boys should learn the *lovo* in school. Boys should learn to weave baskets; they don't know how.
- Marilyn: There are vocational and academic subjects. Which is best?
- Seriana: They should have more vocational.
- Marilyn: Which would you send your boys to?
- Seriana: Academic.

Although Seriana felt that vocational skills were important, she still wanted her own two boys to receive an academic education. Although the boys were only starting school, she told me they wanted to be a pilot and an engineer, careers that required post-secondary education. She planned on sending them to an Indian secondary school on the mainland because "they have good exam results." The exams are written only in academic subject areas.

This understanding of the need for vocational training juxtaposed with the wish for an academic education for their child was also evident in the interview with Makareta and Maikali who had a daughter going to school on the mainland. Maikali had left school after failing his Class 8 exam. He worked with a carpenter, learning the trade on the job and now did carpentry work in the village and at the resort.

- Marilyn: If a boy came to you and asked if he could learn to be a carpenter from you what would you tell him?
- Maikali: Go to school on the mainland.
- Marilyn: Why?
- Maikali: The measuring tape, measuring the house and the square. [i.e., learn to use the tools, learn to measure.]

As a tradesperson, Maikali believed that vocational skills should be taught in the school. Interestingly, while traditional building skills such as roof-thatching were taught in the village, Maikali felt that non-traditional carpentry skills should be taught at school. While Maikali may have passed some of his carpentry skills on informally to boys during

village work, he would not have presumed to take on more of a Western-style teaching role of Western subject matter. The status of teachers and the role of parents in the schools are discussed to a greater extent in Chapter 6 with regards to parental involvement in student achievement.

Maikali and his wife, Makareta, also suggested that other vocational subjects such as cooking, housecleaning, hotel management, and mechanics should be taught at school, because they were skills needed at the community-run resort. But despite the need they saw for vocational skills even in their own community, when asked specifically about their daughter, their reply, without hesitation, was that they wanted her in an academic program. They hoped she would become a teacher.

These and other interviews supported Sharma's assertion discussed above that Fijians viewed vocational subjects as second-rate (2000, pp. 132-148). The people of Totoka who were interviewed recognized community needs and job opportunities for vocationally trained workers. Even though vocational skills were seen as important, when it came to their own children's education, parents wanted their children to receive an academic education. Many mentioned the professional jobs that they hoped that their children would get after completing their education.

But completing secondary school and going on to post-secondary education was not just a means to a job, education carried value in the status that it provided to the individual and to the entire family. In his book about his village on the mainland, Ravuvu (1988) describes how the community was considered backwards because it did not have a member who had gone to university. After his graduation, many people expressed to him their appreciation for the status and prestige that he brought to the community (p. 69). In

Totoka, there seemed to be a similar ascription of status to education. In the last section, Kaliopate talked about his brother going on to University so as to “raise up” his grandfather’s name. In contrast, a young woman was embarrassed to tell me that no-one in her *mataqali* had gone on to post-secondary education, indicating that education was an important element of a family’s status.

While education itself brought status to individuals and their families, a resulting professional job brought status and resources not only to the individual or the immediate family but to the entire community. The Head Teacher told me how the chief of a related village on the mainland set as her goal to finally get one member of the village into a government job. It was a matter of status for the entire community to have even one person in a managerial-level position, which required an academic education.

Kaliopate explained how a government job held more than just the status of membership in an elite club. Other professions such as teaching were also respected and carried status, but a community member in a government job also brought resources to the community.

Marilyn: What does Totoka need?

Kaliopate: More education. If the village has more educated persons, so they have a bright [future]. If someone from the village is in the Ministry of Finance, like my brother, when we want something it goes through the [government office]. Like in [the next island], no educated person in the Ministry. They can’t go and knock on the door.

With a community member in a government office, when the community needs something they can go to that person and “knock on the door.” Whether it was a correct perception or not, Kaliopate felt that without someone in the Ministry, the community would have little access to the resources of that Ministry.

There were two exceptions to the view of vocational programs as second-rate: mechanics and hotel management. There was a mechanic from another village who was hired to work at the resort, keeping the generator and the outboard motors running. He was much in demand and had a great deal of status, especially amongst the younger men. Two young men mentioned that they would like to train to become a mechanic. The other exception was Etika, the young man who had attended the elite government school in Suva. Etika was a member of a chiefly family and was studying hotel management. While hotel management would be classed as a vocational certificate, it was a post-secondary program and the people of Totoka spoke of him proudly as the young person on the island who was doing the most with his education. With the opportunities in tourism in Fiji and his connections with influential families he would probably do very well.

Jobs like mechanic or hotel manager may seem to Westerners to be of lower status, a vocation rather than a profession. But the status of these jobs also came from their usefulness to the family, as much as their education level. In a location where boats were necessary for livelihood as well as transportation, a mechanic who could keep the motor running was invaluable. Hotel management required a post-secondary diploma from the Fiji Institute of Technology, but it was also the ability of a hotel manager to hire family members that brought status to the position.

Both of these vocations provided a status similar to that which an academic education would provide. The literature describes how an academic education works as a strict initiation into an elite club, providing status by becoming accepted as part of a higher class (Gould, 1993). Becoming a mechanic or a hotel manager would not appear to



carry the same status. In Totoka, however, status appeared to also be attached to positions that were able to provide resources and jobs to family. One way for individuals to increase their status to increase their ability to contribute to economic relationships.

On the other hand, the benefits of farming and fishing were available to everyone. The land and the sea were usually bountiful and were there for all to share. Becoming a better farmer or fisher did not benefit the entire family the way a government job or a hotel management position could. Higher status was given those jobs that provided the family with resources not available to everyone.

How educational policy-makers understand education's role in the economic development of a country often directs educational policy. For decades, the predominant theory that more relevant, vocational education will have a positive effect on economic development has prevailed. The people of Totoka, however, preferred an academic focus to education because of the potential benefit to their families. As described in the previous section, parents wanted their children to have the opportunity to move on to a high-status, well-paid job on the mainland, after school. An academic program gave their children that opportunity.

The people of Totoka were also aware that not all of their children would succeed in an academic program. In that case, they believed that their children could return to the island and have a good life there. Moreover, it was not actually to the family's benefit to have all of the children leave for secondary school and stay on the mainland to work. For the people on the island, formal, advanced education was for the benefit of the family and the community, but not necessary for each individual.

With the large numbers of young people who did not finish secondary school, it might appear that the academic programs that they were entering were not of value to them or to the community. However, the people of Totoka still wanted their children to have the opportunity to access the prestigious jobs available only through an academic education.

Writing about education throughout the Pacific Island Countries, Boutilier asks:

Should educational systems be designed to produce better horticulturists and outboard motor repairmen? Clearly such vocational education would seem most appropriate for preserving traditional ways of life and national self-sufficiency. And yet there is a brute resistance to such concepts on the part of islanders who, although lamenting the erosion of the old ways, are not prepared to see their sons or daughters consigned to second-class status. What the parents want is equality of opportunity for their children, equality of access to educational opportunities, which, in practice, translates into access to "professional" education of the sort suitable for employment in the towns, for high status bureaucratic or business appointments, or for posts overseas. (1992, p. 81)

While the people of Totoka recognized that farming and fishing was an important part of their traditional way of life, they also acknowledged the reality that agricultural work was of lesser status. As explained earlier in the description of life in Fiji and in the relatively traditional life in Totoka, status was important in the cultural as well as the economic life of a family and village. Clearly from the interviews in the previous section, the people of Totoka did not want a school system to produce better farmers and fishers, but a school system that would offer their children the possibility, however slim, of high-status, high-paid employment.

The economic circumstances in Fiji dictated that the best way to get paid employment was to get the highest academic qualifications possible. In Gannicott's words: "It is the 'academic' education which is vocational in Fiji's circumstances" (1990,

p. 18). Curriculum reform cannot counteract the existing economic situation in a country. Encouraging parents to enroll their children in vocational programs, telling them that the programs are of equal status, does not change the reality that there is a job hierarchy. Parents wanted their children to have the best opportunities available to them. The school system that provided Fijian children with the "equality of opportunity" to which Boutilier refers was one which put them on the path to graduating with an academic certificate, not a vocational diploma.

The parents of Totoka supported the academic school system because they believed that it would offer their children the best opportunity for improving their status as well as their economic situation. So, with a high level of support for the existing school programs, why were there so many young people on the island who had not completed their education?

While some children did leave school because it was hard to pay the fees, because their grades were not good enough or they missed school due to illness these did not appear to be insurmountable problems for the Totoka families. What did appear to happen is that parents were willing to let their child leave school because they believed that they could have a good life in the village without further education. Education was not a necessity for life on the island.

Komai was one of the three children who left school before completing Class 8. His father Anare had previously been chair of the school committee and he continued to serve on the committee. Both Anare and his wife, Jieni, were at all of the school events. Anare talked to me about why he let his son leave school:

His mother would have to drag him; he hated it. So I don't pressure him. Education is important and people will blame me, the parent. I have a plan: when he is 21 I will buy him a boat. That will be his future.

Owning a boat on the island was prestigious and could be very lucrative. Anare and his brother jointly owned a boat and Anare used it to collect fish twice a week from neighbouring islands to sell on the mainland. They also had a contract to provide staff transport to an upscale resort in the area. Anare's household was relatively well-off; he bought Jieni a gas stove, built a flush toilet and purchased a TV and VCR. He knew that even without secondary education Komai could earn a good living on the island.

Others agreed with Anare that they and their children could have a good life on the island without having secondary education. Mitieli Senior commented "We are told to [go to] school for your future. I'm not good in school but I am living happily." When I specifically asked how much education a person needed to live in the village, I rarely received an answer, with the interviewee often confused as to what the question meant. It was as if formal education was so irrelevant to their day-to-day life in the village that the question did not even make sense to them.

Completing an academic, secondary program would provide the greatest opportunities for paid employment, which was desirable. But it was not necessary for the individual young person to have a high level of education in order to have a comfortable life, economically. What was important was that at least one person in the family completed their education and found employment.

### *Education for the Family Not the Individual*

The welfare of the entire family was more important to the people of Totoka than the education of any individual member. Therefore it was not necessary that all family members finish secondary school, only that someone did. Having some family members with an education provided a number of benefits to the family. Besides the prestige of having a secondary school certificate, a family member with a wage job brought valuable resources to the family. Even though they might be living on the mainland, workers were still considered part of a village family and expected to make their contribution.

The extended family relationships and the tradition of *kerekere*, of asking relatives for contributions, was strong in Totoka. There were many instances of sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins who had jobs on the mainland being asked to contribute financially to family or community projects. In preparation for the rugby tournament described in the introduction, employed people from Totoka were each asked to contribute \$50 towards expenses. Some students were being “sponsored” by a relative in a wage job, who was paying their school expenses.

Some family members were also needed to stay on the island, working in the garden, with household chores, and working in the community. Even children contributed a significant amount of labour to a family: fishing, gathering firewood, cleaning the compound, cooking, looking after smaller siblings. The absence of a teenager who could work as well as an adult was a major loss to the family. As well, there was the loss of a family member to contribute to village obligations: building *bures*, yam planting, weaving.

Whether young people went on to jobs on the mainland or returned to work in the village, they were still contributing members of their family and community. Different members of a family would be expected to make different contributions to the welfare of the family. Those who had the greatest potential to contribute through wage employment were given the education they needed to do so.

Family educational decisions about supporting education and supporting individual children attending school were made within the larger context of decisions made regarding the family. In a similar situation in India, Subrahmanian found that

While education was valued on the whole by parents, the management of children's education was based on short- to medium term material considerations, as well as broader views about what and how it was that education could contribute to household security in the long-term. (1997, p. 109)

Totoka parents, too, took a broad view of the benefits of education to their family. But their decisions were based on more than immediate material considerations that could be met through wage employment.

In a society with an economic system that depended on relationships (Tukai 1988, p. 15), maintaining those relationships and a family's status was as important to the family's livelihood as a wage. Education was seen as one way to increase status and bring economic benefit to the family, but it was not the only way. As a result, the people of Totoka supported an education system that provided some member of their family the wage as well as the status that would benefit the entire family. Other family members could take on important roles in the family that did not require formal education.

In Totoka, education was seen as being important to the economic development of the family and the community. But other things also played important roles. Status,

relationships and traditions were as important to a family's security as employment that was available through education.

### **Social Development and Education**

In the previous section, I have shown how the education system must recognize the economic importance of the individual's connections to the family and community; connections established through status, relationships and traditions. In this section I turn the focus to education's role in the social development of the larger community. Once again, the importance of status, relationships and traditions becomes apparent.

The education system is often used as the vehicle to improve the social development of a community, as evidenced in health (World Health Organization, 1998), citizenship (Kochhar and Gopal, 1997), and environmental (World Wildlife Fund, 2004) education programs in schools around the world. What became apparent through my interviews with the community members in this study was that the theory that education could improve the social development of a community conflicted with the community's own view of the education system and social development. The analysis that is presented in this section identifies two key areas of concern:

1. The use of the school system to maintain culture and language, and
2. The school system's role in instigating changes in the community.

These two goals are evident in the literature, where educators are called upon to teach in the local language and include local culture in the curriculum (Kirkness & Bowman, 1997; Thaman, 1993); at the same time international organizations are using the school systems to bring about changes in attitudes and behaviours, especially around health, the

environment, and democracy (for example, the World Health Organization in *Helping schools to become health promoting schools*, 1998; and the World Wildlife Fund, 2004).

Education's tenuous role in social development, as shown in these two apparently contradictory statements, is a consequence of the contradiction facing Fijian society described by Nayacakalou in 1972:

It seems to me that one of the greatest obstacles facing the Fijians today is the failure to recognise that there is a contradiction; they must now make the momentous choice between preserving and changing their way of life. The belief that they can do both simultaneously is a monstrous nonsense with which they have been saddled for so many years now that its eradication may be very difficult to achieve. (In Firth & Tarte, 2001, p. 132)

Over thirty years after Nayacakalou's observation, the schools in Fiji were still trying to accommodate this contradiction. Talking with the people of Totoka, I learned that they were grappling with this dilemma of maintaining traditions while accepting change.

Culture and language were very important to them. They wanted their culture and language to be supported by the school system, but they felt it was their own responsibility to teach their children their culture and language. They depended on the school system to teach their children the skills necessary to succeed in the outside world (Hoar, 2002). These skills, especially learning to speak English, brought status, and therefore resources, to the entire family. While the school system was expected to bring the knowledge of the outside world to their children, the community of Totoka did not want this knowledge to change the fundamentals of their own society. They supported school curricula that supported these fundamentals of status, relationships and traditions.

These two contradictions are presented separately. First the national context is presented regarding national policy and public opinion on maintaining culture and



language through the school system. Then an analysis of interviews reveals how the community members of Totoka believe the school should be involved in maintaining culture and language. The issue of instigating change through education is then examined by looking at the success of international initiatives on changing behaviour in the community of Totoka.

### *How the People of Totoka View Culture and Language*

When parents and the community have lost or are losing their language and cultural traditions, hope is placed in the next generation, the young people, to sustain the culture (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Teachers and parents are encouraged to use the local language, there are classes to teach the language, and where possible, academic subjects are taught in the language. Cultural traditions are incorporated into school life and cultural courses are offered (Charters-Voght, 1991; Thaman, 1993).

For the people of Totoka, traditional culture and language were very important. They looked to the traditions of Fijian culture to maintain the relationships that held their community together, socially and economically. However, the people of Totoka knew that they could not rely on the school system to maintain and strengthen their language and culture, especially when they did not expect all children to continue through twelve years of school. With most children remaining in the village they felt it was their own responsibility to instruct their children in their language and culture.

There was some concern about loss of language and culture; nevertheless, learning English at school was a priority. Everyone in the community wanted the school to give

their children an opportunity for wage employment off the island. Besides needing English for employment, the ability to speak English well was a status symbol. For the community members in Totoka, the maintenance of language and culture was the responsibility of the family and community.

The majority of people in Totoka felt strongly that they wanted their children to learn English at school. In the formal interviews, almost every person whom I asked about English in the schools responded that it was an important subject and most thought that more English should be taught. Only three male elders in the community expressed concern that English was replacing Fijian, as well as concern over loss of culture.

Alena, a young mother who was well-educated and had worked on the mainland, felt that the school should focus on teaching English:

It should be compulsory to speak English as much as they can. There is no excuse with the resort here that the kids can't speak English well. It should be all in English from Class One and then explain in Fijian if necessary. On the mainland they have to speak English. Leave Fijian for Fijian class. Teach as much English as they can learn.

Alena also thought that she should teach her children English at home, even before they went to Kindergarten. Most parents were content to leave teaching English to the teachers, but thought that it should be a priority in the school.

Loraini was a middle-aged woman who left school after Form 3. I talked to her about her education as well as that of her sons:

Marilyn: What would you have liked to have learned in school?  
Loraini: English. More English.

We talked about her son going on to school on the mainland. Some young people had problems coming back to the village after living on the mainland.

- Marilyn: Is it the school that changes the children?  
Loraini: Yes. Many of them come back and talk English, not Fijian. They mix up English and Fijian.  
Marilyn: Should they study more Fijian?  
Loraini: No, more English. Every work job they need English. Improve their English. In our school they speak Fijian.

Loraini acknowledged that students who go to school on the mainland lose some of their traditions, even their language. Nevertheless, she felt that they had to learn English in school because every “work” job required English. She was not happy that they spoke so much Fijian at Totoka School.

Loraini mentions the main reason others also gave for wanting children to learn English: to give them the opportunity for a wage job. But the ability to speak English also provided individuals, and their families, with increased status. The disdain given to a non-English speaking Fijian was made obvious on the day of the attempted coup. After stating on TV that the coup was made on behalf of Indigenous Fijian rights, the coup leader introduced his choice for Prime Minister, who addressed Fijians in the national dialect<sup>12</sup>. The matriarch of the island looked disapprovingly at the TV screen and commented, “He doesn’t even speak English!” She was voicing the high regard in which speaking English was held on the island. Anyone could speak Fijian, but leaders had to be able to speak English.

Through conversations with community members and observing their interactions, it became apparent that speaking English was a status symbol for a variety of reasons. A person who spoke English had an opportunity for a high-status job such as teaching or government work. The community members of Totoka respected education, and speaking

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<sup>12</sup> Background to the attempted coup can be found in Chapter 3.

English was an obvious sign of education. Even if someone did not work in tourism, being able to speak English gave him or her the opportunity to make connections with tourists coming to the island. Being able to connect with high-status visitors increased someone's status, as these visitors were also a source of resources, gifts and money for the family.

Sefanaia, one of the older men, expressed concern over losing the language because of the concentration of English in the schools. Sefanaia was the head of one of the *mataqali* and one of his grandchildren, Peceli, was in kindergarten on Totoka.

Now they start English in Kindy<sup>13</sup> and not how to speak in their own language. If they taught in their own language, every Fijian would be good in school. They can read the book in English but they don't know what it means. They would if it was in Fijian. The Kindy kids learn English colours and don't know Fijian. Peceli saw a colour on TV and he said "red." I asked him what colour it was in Fijian and he didn't know.

Questions could be raised about why Peceli was not learning Fijian at home and if Fijian is not taught at home how using Fijian at school would help Peceli. But what is obvious in this quote is Sefanaia's concern not only about the loss of language, but also his belief that children would do better at school in their mother tongue. This proposition about language of instruction is discussed further in the next chapter.

These male leaders of the community were also concerned about the loss of traditional culture, and the loss of respect for elders, especially respect for the traditional leadership in the village. They attributed some of these changes to education. I spoke with Tai Uraia, the head of a large extended family, in his traditional *bure* where many official ceremonies took place. While we talked, Mona sat on a pile of mats in the place

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<sup>13</sup> Kindergarten was often referred to as "Kindy".

of honour in the *bure*, listening to us talk. Mona had started menstruating and spent the length of her first period in the *bure*. Rather than seclusion, it was a tradition of celebration, with the men coming every night to have a *kava* ceremony in the *bure*. Many traditions such as this were still observed in Totoka.

Marilyn: What changes have you seen in the young people?

Uraia: A lot of change. Before they used to learn only Fijian, their own dialect, and now they learn *Bauan* and English.

Marilyn: Is that change good?

Uraia: What they used to do before is now changed. At 14, you finished school and worked with the village. Now they go on to school on the mainland. When they come back they don't follow the system. The *Turaga Ni Koro* tells the boys to do something but now the young boys have no respect.

Uraia was concerned about the loss of language, especially the local dialect. But he was also concerned that children who went away to school also lost the cultural values such as respect for the traditional village leaders.

I interviewed Inoke in his new, concrete block house. He had worked on the mainland, but had recently returned to live in the village fulltime. He was well respected and quite influential on the island.

Marilyn: Are you worried about the loss of your culture?

Inoke: In the village it's better. On the mainland, Fiji is [moving too quickly ahead]: never use their language, talk in English.

Marilyn: Many parents and teachers think they need to learn more English?

Inoke: Yes, I know that. That's why the government built a new school to teach culture.

Inoke referred to the two elite government schools (RKS and QVS) where besides academics, culture was also taught. Both of these schools were close to Suva and had high admittance standards. Most of the students from Totoka went to Indian administered schools that were closer, less expensive and accepted lower exam results.

- Marilyn: What kind of things do they teach?  
Inoke: At RKS and QVS: taught about culture. But in Indian schools they never learn. In Fijian schools, they teach serving *kava*, the ceremony.  
Marilyn: Should they teach gardening?  
Inoke: Yes.  
Marilyn: Not as much English?  
Inoke: No, they should speak in English in Class Two. What I mean, they learn [respect].

While traditional Fijian skills, such as gardening, were important to Inoke, he thought the ceremonies, such as the *kava* ceremony, were vital to preserving the culture. More than how to pound and serve the *kava*, the ceremony taught important Fijian values such as respect. The ceremony was important in Fijian society for establishing and solidifying social relations.

Inoke appears to be contradicting himself, wanting more Fijian culture to be taught in the schools, and yet recommending that students speak English in the school as early as Class Two. Inoke expected the schools to perform a delicate balancing act, teaching their children English, but also maintaining the Fijian culture.

Other than the concerns of these three men, support for the emphasis on English in the schools was high. While these men definitely saw the school as a major factor in the maintenance of culture, other community members were less certain about teaching culture in the schools. Like the men, others commented on the changes they saw in students returning from school on the mainland; they did not behave in a proper manner in the village. But these changes were attributed to life on the mainland, rather than school curricula. People thought that culture should be taught in the schools, but also felt that ultimately it was the parents' responsibility to instill Fijian values in their children. They felt that if Fijian culture was instilled in the home, their children would retain their

culture even if they went to school on the mainland. For them, the families played the main role in maintaining culture.

The young people themselves were the locus of the tension between doing well in school and learning English while not losing their culture. Etika was a young man from Totoka who had attended one of the elite government schools. He had gone on to post-secondary education, studying hotel management at the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT).

Marilyn: Should the schools teach culture?

Etika: Yes, most of the time at QVS<sup>14</sup>, we practiced how to perform the ceremony. It should be taught in school. In FIT, in cultural study, they asked who knew how to serve the *kava*, I was the only one. Maybe it's not taught in homes. I also learned it at home, watching *Tai*.

While Etika thought the ceremonies should be taught in school, he recognized that the families also had a role in maintaining the culture. Etika told me that one night in the village, Maikali and Sefanaia were talking. Sefanaia was blaming the school for bringing change.

Marilyn: What do you think?

Etika: Maybe. Sefanaia said it's not a good thing. Education can really devastate our culture, to think negatively. They pointed at me and said 'you go to school and forget your culture'. One part is true. One part is not true. We live in a modern world; it is changing a lot. There is modern technology. What if education didn't come?

Marilyn: Is there a way to balance the two?

Etika: A person should know how to live in his culture. Education is the main reason we can go out in the world. The best way is to learn lots about our culture, [know] our culture, how we live in a modern society.

As a future leader of his community, Etika had thought a lot about the changes that were happening to his community and to all of Fiji. He wanted to learn about his culture and

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<sup>14</sup> Queen Victoria School was the elite government school for Fijians.

felt that it should be kept strong. However, he expected education to provide him with the tools to survive in the larger world.

### *People's Reactions to Change*

The issue of how the school system is involved in community change is paradoxical. On one hand, as discussed earlier, the school is blamed for change, especially the loss of culture and language. On the other hand, the school is used to instigate change; changes in attitudes and practices that are felt will improve the social development of a community and often an entire nation.

Many submissions to *The Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel Report* dealt with the important role they saw for education in changing attitudes and behaviours about a variety of issues. The Report does not discuss to what extent and in what ways these organizations contribute curriculum materials and resources to Fijian schools. However, in Totoka School I saw books, posters and stickers distributed by environment and health organizations. Many of these organizations had educational programs, sending curriculum materials and speakers to schools.

All of the various causes have validity and are endorsed by school systems because educators as well as the larger society see them as being important. This is not to say that education does not have a role in social development and is only useful as a training device for the economic system. Schools have always been an important site for the socialization of young people. What is important to consider is the efficacy and desirability of using the school system to create societal change, particularly in a traditional, hierarchical community like Totoka.



One of the most extensive campaigns in the South Pacific was one by environmental organizations to protect sea turtles. Fiji had signed an international treaty banning the killing of turtles and had laws in place against their killing. Even several of the chiefs were fined after making their traditional presentation of turtles to the Great Council of Chiefs. I was not at Totoka to observe the educational campaign on protecting the sea turtle, but there was evidence that the school had been involved in some program. There were several large full colour posters in the school on protecting the ocean environment and animals such as the sea turtle figured prominently. Stickers on protecting the environment were still visible around the school and in the villages.

One evening when I joined my host family for dinner I was not surprised to see a stew of red meat; I had seen the boys gathering up goats and thought it was goat stew. However, as I finished a piece of meat, I realized that the bone I held was not one from a goat. I asked Naivou what I was eating and she made a motion like a turtle moving its flippers. I explained that although it was very good I could not eat anymore because turtles should not be killed, but did not go into a further "lecture" on the matter in an attempt to change their practice. That was the beginning of turtle season and for the next several weeks we saw many turtles brought in on boats. One of them barely fit into the boat as its shell was over a metre wide.

There was a man on the island that said that he was designated as the Fisheries Officer and would go out after strangers' boats and chase them out of Totoka's fishing area. I asked him about the turtles but he seemed not to know or to care about the ban. I was uncomfortable being too critical of a practice that the people of Totoka had been practicing for generations. Yet, the people of Totoka were aware that foreigners became

upset when they saw the turtles being caught and killed. They consciously made sure that they did not bring the turtles in close enough to the resort that they might be seen. The education program seemed to have created awareness but not changed practice.

I wondered if perhaps the health education programs or the programs on garbage disposal had been more effective. I asked Mareta, the teacher who had been at the school for six years if she had seen the school programs make any difference in the village. She said "No, not at this time. Maybe the next generation. No matter how much we educate, we see the same thing. Maybe when the old generation passes away." It seemed that the education programs at the school had very little effect on current practices in the village.

In a traditional, hierarchical society such as the Fijian society, children are not in a position to bring new knowledge that they have learned at school into the community or even to question existing practice. In Canada, educational programs often encourage children to examine practices in their homes and to question their parents. For example, it is common in Canada for children who have been at a no smoking campaign to question their parents about their smoking and actively teach their parents about the hazards of smoking. In Fiji, the children's relationship with their parents and other adults does not allow them to question or even to voice concern. Even young adults do not have a voice in the community or even in the family. Community and even *mataqali* or extended-family discussions happen in the evenings around the *kava* bowl and are organized in a very formal manner, recognizing the hierarchy of the individuals present. The male elders sit in front of the *kava* bowl and everyone else sits behind it. Traditionally, only these elders speak, with others only offering information when requested to do so.

Maikali, the head of one of the *mataqali*, talked to me about how he was trying to change the format of these meetings. Traditionally, he explained, only the heads of clans could talk, telling people what to do. Instead, he encouraged everyone to talk, even the women. He said that he could not tell people what to do, but could lead them after letting them have a say. He occasionally had meetings of his immediate family and he told his children the meeting was open and they could say what they wanted. This was an unusual practice, even for his eldest son who was 26 and working at the resort. Children, though they may be adults, were not expected to take part in community or family decision-making.

So it would be difficult for children to communicate what they learned in school about protection of sea turtles to their families and community. The only adult that tried to stop the turtle-hunting was the Head Teacher who told me that she told her son to throw the turtle that he had caught back into the sea. He did, but even she did not have the authority or influence to change the practice of the community. The hierarchical nature of the Fijian society along with the importance of traditions did not permit children to bring what they had learned into the community. Therefore, trying to initiate change in the community through the school was not very effective.

Internationally, it is a common and accepted practice for schools to be involved in the social development of communities. Sometimes the schools are expected to resist change, for example in maintaining language and culture. And at the same time the schools would be expected to instigate change, affecting the attitudes and practice of a community.

The people of Totoka felt this tension between change and tradition. They wanted their children to learn skills necessary in the world outside of their community, but they were not willing to accept social development that did not fit into their understanding of the role of education in their lives or the traditions of their society. Community members supported education that upheld the community's established patterns of tradition, status, and relationships. As long as no attempt was made for the school's curricula to fit these patterns, the school had little success in initiating change in the community.

### **Relationships, Status, and Tradition**

Keeping in mind the importance of relationships, status, and tradition in the social and therefore economic fabric of Fijian society, the seemingly contradictory roles that Fijians saw for education in the economic and social development of their community began to make sense. As mentioned in the discussion on attitude, the people of Totoka supported education that provided an opportunity for increased status. Therefore, they placed an emphasis on teaching English and on an academic education - an education that would provide increased status. These were skills that they did not feel capable as a community of passing on to their children. They did feel capable of teaching their children their cultural traditions and their language, thereby maintaining their culture and language.

The community supported changes, such as learning English, that sustained the traditions of their society based on status and relationships. They were less likely to accommodate changes that did not support their society. While they wanted the school system to teach skills such as speaking English, they did not want the school system to teach values that contradicted their own traditions and social structure. They supported a

school system that reinforced the relationships that were vital to their society. Respect for their elders, participation in communal activities, and appropriate behaviour in the village were traditional values that had to be a part of the formal education system. Attempts at social change that circumvented the traditional hierarchical relationships of Totokan society were not successful.

## **6. PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION**

Parent and community members' involvement in education is the theme discussed in this chapter. One focus that is apparent in the literature is that parents and community members are encouraged to get involved in educational activities because of the positive effect on student achievement (Epstein, 1997; Jackson & Cooper, 1992). A theory that is also prevalent in international development literature is that community involvement can improve financing and accountability (Colclough, 1993; Uemara, 1999; World Bank, 1995).

In this chapter, first I look at parental involvement in education and argue that because of the high status of teachers relative to most parents, the Western model of teacher-parent partnership does not readily apply in Totoka. Second, I examine the involvement of other community members in education. While the community of Totoka is very involved in managing and financing their local school, I argue that this support is due to traditions, status, and relationships not necessarily because they see the benefits to student achievement. Finally, I discuss the limitations of local control over accountability in the traditional, hierarchical community of Totoka.

### **Parental Involvement**

A variety of educational literature supports the theory that parental involvement in the education of their children increases student achievement. Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement are used by educators throughout North America<sup>15</sup> based on her

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<sup>15</sup> For example, her model is included on websites for the Colorado Department of Education, the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, and Westwood Elementary School, Minnesota.

research that partnerships between school, family and community will help students succeed in school. Two of the types of involvement are “volunteering” and “learning at home.” Volunteering suggestions include surveying parents to identify talents that could be used in the school and the classroom. Learning at home is described as the school providing information on how families can help students with homework.

Case studies from development literature show that projects use parental and community involvement as an indirect means of increasing student achievement (For example, Chad Basic Education Project and Tanzania Human Resources Development Pilot Project, Uemura, 1999). Common to many of these projects in developing countries is a belief that increased community involvement will improve attitudes towards education, thereby increasing enrollment and attendance, and resulting in improved student achievement. The tenuous links between community attitudes in Totoka towards education and student enrollment have been discussed in Chapter 5.

Another aspect of the theory of how community involvement in education enhances student achievement focuses on the congruence between community and school (Thaman, 1993). Some programs in First Nations schools in Canada are based on this theory that students perform better in school environments that are similar to and support their home culture (McKay & McKay, 1987). Parents and community members are encouraged to be actively involved in the classrooms and in developing curriculum materials. In the previous chapter, I presented the view of the people of Totoka that, rather than reflecting Fijian society, the school should offer their children an opportunity to succeed outside of the village, by teaching them English and skills appropriate for

Western culture. This view of education influenced how they saw their involvement in their children's education.

This study found that the theory that parental involvement positively affects student achievement may not be directly applicable to education in developing countries where the school reflects a Western culture very different from the community. I present the argument that, in Fiji, the status of teachers does not permit the "partnership" model of parent involvement prevalent in parent involvement programs in North America. Parent and teacher roles were highly differentiated with the teacher taking the predominant role in student achievement.

The discussion in this section is limited to parent and community involvement in educational activities other than fundraising and maintenance. As will be shown in the next section, the community was very involved in raising money for the school as well as being responsible for the maintenance of the school building and grounds.

### *Fijian Values, Western Behaviours Reflected in the School*

Educational theory in many First Nations schools in Canada as well as in developing countries states that a school environment that reflects the community will enhance student academic success. Schools in Canada have had success bringing community elders into the schools to ensure that the local culture and language are present in the education system. Community members are often directly involved in developing curriculum, bringing local knowledge into history, science, language, and social studies classes. As mentioned previously these programs are important for preserving the culture



and language. There is also evidence in North America that congruence between school and community improves student achievement (McKay & McKay, 1987, pp.64-85).

Educators in developing countries have also adopted the theory that schools should reflect the students' home culture. A program in Mexico with a goal of improving rural primary based education had the "basic assumption...that academic failure is rooted in the gap between the education system and the ways disadvantaged children communicate, learn, and interact" (Lopez, 1998). The program's goals included involving parents, school authorities and community members in the "educational process." The program was very popular and materials were distributed throughout rural, indigenous schools in Mexico, although the report did not indicate whether or not there were improved student achievements.

In contrast, the people of Totoka did not want their school to focus on the culture and language of their community. The previous chapter's discussion regarding the role of education in economic development showed how the community wanted the school to educate their children in the language and culture of the outside world. The community did have a great deal of input into the Totoka Village School, even though it was based on the British colonial system, not a traditional Fijian education model. The school committee was comprised completely of members from the community. The teachers were all Fijian; at the time of this study some teachers were even from Totoka. In a fine balancing act, the school was expected to uphold the underlying values of Fijian society while at the same time it was expected to be a reflection of the Western world, not the Fijian village.

The teachers understood the goal of teaching the students the ways of the Western world, rather than focussing on Fijian language and culture. Ravuvu provides a vivid example in the simple act of asking students to stand to show respect in the classroom (1988, p. 36). Traditionally, Fijians would show respect by sitting down, staying lower than someone with higher status. In the village, children were expected to sit immediately when entering a room where older people were seated. But in Totoka Village School, when greeting the teacher or a guest, the entire class would stand, adopting the Western rather than Fijian mode of respect. Classroom behaviour was expected to be different from behaviour in the village: Western instead of Fijian.

### *Parental Involvement in Totoka*

This view of the role of education as training for the outside world directed the type of involvement parents and community members saw for themselves in supporting their children's educational achievement. They willingly accepted the task of preparing their children for school, looking after their basic needs, teaching them to work hard and to listen to the teacher. But they did not see a role for themselves in the classrooms or in involvement with curriculum.

Almost every parent interviewed described his or her role as primarily one of paying fees. As described previously, while fees for primary school were small (\$2-5 per term), the costs for sending children to secondary school were much higher and could be difficult for subsistence farmers and fishers. Finding the money to pay school expenses would be the primary concern for many parents. Also, with children living with relatives closer to school during the week, or on the mainland for the entire school term, the parents' role became much more limited. Paying for their children's education became

important because it was the only thing parents could do if they were unable to monitor their child's performance and behaviour on a daily or even weekly basis.

Rather than being directly involved in classroom activities, parents often felt that their role was one of instilling a proper attitude in their children. This interview with Loraini was typical of how parents saw this role.

Marilyn: What do you do as a parent to help your son?

Kara: Always talk to him every time, to be learning hard. Because his father has no job. To help him, talk to him, about manners. Don't follow other boys or do something bad. Tell him to go to church and pray every day. School is hard for him. He is sitting Class 8 again. Last year he got 333<sup>16</sup>. I ask him to sit again and work hard. To be a teacher if he works hard.

Parents were clear about their role of teaching their children to be good people. Good parents were those who sent well-behaved children to school to be taught by the teacher.

Parents did not consider direct involvement in schoolwork as part of their role. Some parents did say that they felt it was important to ensure their children did their homework, but few instances were observed of parents helping their children with homework. One of the major complaints by the teachers was that children did not do their assignments at home and they attributed that situation to parental indifference.

Even attendance at school functions was not seen as a time to discuss the academic progress of their children with the teacher. Instead parents stressed how their attendance at these events showed their children how important school was to them. One of these events was the exam-day feast. The day started with a special breakfast for the Class 6 or 8 exam class. After prayers and speeches, parents and community members shook the

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<sup>16</sup> The test was out of 500. A score of 333 was not good enough for acceptance into one of the more prestigious secondary schools.

students' hands exhorting them to do their best on the exam. While the students wrote, the fathers gathered around the kava bowl and the mothers started preparing the food. At noon, the students joined the community for the feast, returning to the exams in the afternoon. Many schools on the mainland had stopped having the exam-day feast because of the distraction to the students writing the exam.

I asked Totoka parents what they thought about cancelling the feast. None of them thought that was a good idea.

Seona: From my point of view, I think that's a very foolish idea because the feast is not what the kids are going after, it's the support from the parents. The kids really feel happy to see their parents around while they're doing their exam.

Akuila: If everyone is here, the children are happy. When they aren't here, they are sad. They don't concentrate on the exam.

Nacanieli: [The feast is a way] of supporting for kids. So they can help them study. Give him strength to cope for his exam. If you are not there, the children lose hope. If there, they think: Oh, my father supports me. So I go.

Most parents had experienced the feast when they had gone to school. One mother said that she would hate to have to go to school by herself on exam day, carrying her lunch in a bag. They believed that their presence on exam day was an important means of supporting their children. Rather than being a distraction, they believed that the bustle of preparing food and the sounds of the *kava* being served were reassuring to the students and an incentive for them to do well.

These parents were not involved in their children's education in ways advocated by research in North America (Valdez, 1996, pp. 166-67). They did not read to their children or go over homework and tests with them. While they were often at the school and viewed it as "their" school, few of them discussed their children's academic progress

with the teachers. If marks were not high, the children were not given extra tutoring or remedial work at home, but were admonished to work harder at school. It was clear to these parents that teaching their children the academic subjects was the responsibility of the teacher.

When a teacher asked me about getting big books for reading to her students, I took on a project of having mothers create a big book. While many women voiced their enthusiasm and their intention to help, only a few actually took the time to come and help, gathering on the floor of my *bure* to enlarge and colour the pictures from a book. They were very proud of their results, showing the pages to their children and some signing their names on their pages. One evening, I took the finished book to the teacher with hopes that she would encourage mothers to make more of them. As she looked through the pages, rather than praising the mothers' efforts she immediately found a spelling mistake. It took a long time to get the book finished, as the women often did not show up to work on the book. Older women in the village did much of the work. One of the older women told me that the mothers were too busy to work on the book. However, their reluctance to work on the book as well as the reaction of the teacher raised questions for me about the relationship between teacher and parent. It led me to consider how status affected the relationship.

### *The Status of the Teacher*

For the people of Totoka, there was a clear distinction between the roles of the parents and the teachers. Parents were responsible for the moral fibre of the student; the teacher was responsible for making sure that the students passed the exams. In regards to their children's schooling, parents often deferred to the teacher because of the teacher's

expertise but also because of the teacher's status. As a result, the teacher's role often took precedence over the parent's role. These roles may have been determined, partially by the hierarchical structure of Fijian society, but also because, in this context, teachers were seen to have the greatest impact on student academic achievement.

Teachers were given a position of status in the community and in the hierarchy of Fijian society they ranked relatively high because of their profession. This status was due to a variety of factors including history and education. Historically, many teachers were British and carried the status of the colonial government. Totoka's teachers still carried the status of working for the government. The status held by the government was indicated by one teacher's statement that the community respected school property because it was considered government property. Besides the status held over from the colonial period, the status of government positions is also an indication of the traditional Fijian respect for hierarchical leadership positions.

As well, teachers were some of the few people in the community who had been to college and the status of education discussed previously was accorded to the teachers as a result. All teachers were shown a certain amount of respect because of their education and profession. Some teachers in Totoka also were conferred status due to their traditional status in the community. Totoka was somewhat unique in that two of the teachers at Totoka School were also from a high-status family on the island, thus increasing their position in the community. One of these teachers, a young man in his second year of teaching, was telling me about the first time he spoke at a village meeting.

Marilyn: Was it easier because you are from the community?

Fereti: Yes, but I have to tell you something. Because of my social status, I am expected to talk to the people.

Normally, in Fijian society, only the older men were able to speak at meetings. His position of being expected to talk at meetings gave an indication of the status that Fereti held in the community.

Head Teachers, with more status than other teachers, were in positions of leadership and power. Referring to secondary school principals, Tavola writes "In Fiji, the role of principal is perceived as one of high authority; therefore, such position holders have much power invested in them" (1991, p. 82). Head Teachers of primary schools were also accorded high status, especially in small, rural communities.

During the time of this study, the Head Teacher was a woman, making the status of that position more complex. While there were Fijian chiefs who were women and prominent women politicians, in Totoka there were still restrictions on a woman's involvement in the village affairs. Women were often not even present at meetings where decisions were made. The Head Teacher talked to me about the difficulties of being a woman in a leadership position.

Head Teacher: It's difficult. I am a woman and it is the first time they have heard a woman making decisions. I am double minded because as a woman I can't make a decision but as part of [a chiefly family] I have the right to make a decision.

Marilyn: And as Head Teacher?

Head Teacher: Yes. Yes.

As a Head Teacher, she was expected to make decisions that would be followed by the villagers. As a woman, she felt her acceptance in a leadership role was limited and told me that she sent the male teacher to attend meetings of the school committee, which was made up entirely of men. And yet I saw her address the community at school functions and make reports to the school committee. None of the villagers commented on having a woman as a Head Teacher, suggesting that it may not have been an issue for them. It may

have been that her position as Head Teacher was similar to her status in the village due to her family's traditional status. In any case, teachers, men and women, held positions of status in the community.

This status made it difficult for some people in the community to assist the teachers in educational activities. In the example of making the big book, the difference in status may explain why young mothers were reluctant to take part in an activity that was similar to a teacher's activity. Young women seemed to be more comfortable helping the teachers with activities such as cooking that were not similar to teacher activities. The older women who did quite a bit of the work on the book may have been more comfortable doing the activity because their age meant they were closer in status to the teachers. This is speculation, since I did not feel free to ask them about their participation or lack of participation.

### *An Increased Role for Teachers*

In Fijian society, the hierarchies of status were carefully observed. People with status, such as teachers, were expected to make decisions that others followed. Head Teachers in particular were given leadership roles in the community and were given a great deal of authority in matters of education. As a result, the idea of parents and teachers being "partners" in education did not fit well with Fijian society where the difference in status was so acute. In Totoka, parents accepted the authority of the Head Teacher and other teachers in regards to their children's education. Taina told me that when she came back to the island to work at the resort she had wanted her daughter to come to school at Totoka, but her daughter's teacher would not release her from her school on the mainland. Taina missed her daughter very much but rationalized that the



teachers had known what was best for her daughter's education. She was willing to acquiesce to the teacher's decision.

Parents were willing to cede a great deal of their parental role to teachers in order to support their children's academic success. Boarding schools, situations where parents did not have daily contact with their children, were common in Fiji. The people of Totoka were familiar with boarding schools, as many of them had attended them before Totoka Village School was built. Boarding schools were necessary because of the distances between villages and schools in Fiji, but some parents also preferred to send their secondary school age children to a boarding school rather than have them stay with relatives on the mainland. In the rural boarding schools, parents took turns cooking for the students, but the teachers controlled the students' time and activities with the Head Teacher being the ultimate authority in the school compound.

It seemed to me that it was unnecessary for primary school age children not to live with their families while attending Totoka Village School since most children were able to walk to the school from their home or an aunt's home. And yet, a boarding school situation was set up at the school as students prepared for exams. The exam class, either Class Six or Eight, would move to the school for a week before the exam. They slept in the teachers' houses or the library and parents took turns bringing food for the entire class, which they ate together under a *vakatunaloa*, a temporary shelter constructed beside one of the teacher's houses. At 6 am the students were wakened to study before school started. After the evening meal, the generator was started to provide light so that the students could study for several hours before bedtime. On Wednesdays, normally the teachers' Bible Study evening, the teachers led the students in worship. One of the rules

during this week of study was that students were not to go into the village, even though the village was right beside the school grounds.

The teachers liked this arrangement because it gave the students more time to prepare for the exam. Students were freed from family obligations and the generator at the school gave them light by which to study. One teacher mentioned, however, that it was stressful having the class sleep in her home. Consequently, the Head Teacher suggested that the community build a hostel at the school for the students. It was unclear which students would stay in the hostel; some parents thought that it would just be for the exam classes to replace living in the teachers' homes. But the Head Teacher felt that the hostel was necessary to reduce truancy in the larger student population, especially of the students from the far side of the island. Some parents supported the hostel because they did not want to burden their extended family members who lived close to the school by having their children stay with them. During the time of my research, this project became a major one for the Head Teacher as she started to raise money for the construction of the building.

It seemed strange that a hostel would be seen as an important project for a school that was situated so close to the villages. All but one of the parents that I asked about the hostel thought it was a good idea. Some focussed on students learning how to look after themselves, skills they would need when they went on to school on the mainland. Other parents focussed on the closer control that the teachers would have of students in the hostel. Maciu, a young father with secondary education, expressed what he thought about the hostel:

The very best idea. Especially those who are sitting for their exam. If they come back after 4 o'clock, they just play in the village. In the hostel, the teachers can look after them. They can do a lot of schoolwork and improve. If [they have] morning and evening study, [the teachers] don't have to come and get them from the village.

Maciu talked about parents, especially fathers, not taking on their responsibilities to make sure that their children did their homework. But rather than changing parents' behaviour, Maciu thought that the hostel was the best hope "because the teachers are in charge of the hostel." While parents would still be involved in bringing food for the children, the teachers would have the greater authority at the hostel regarding the students' activities after school. People seemed willing to give up their own role as parents if they thought it was important for their children's success at school.

Teachers appeared to accept the status of their position that allowed them to take over the role of the parent. The Head Teacher told me that she was concerned about one girl because there were nine children in her house and the carpenters were also living there while they were building a new house. She asked the girl to come and live with her so that she could give her more help with her schoolwork. I was surprised that that Head Teacher would think that having a student live with her was a solution, rather than suggesting to the parents that the student needed more help at home with her studies. However, at several different times, individual students who were not in exam classes but were falling behind in their schoolwork came to live with their teacher for a while.

Aunts have a similar position of status that allows them to take their nieces and nephews to live with them for a period of time; a decision that parents are not always able to question. In a position of status similar to that of "aunt," teachers' decisions would not usually be questioned. Perhaps not surprisingly then, the Head Teacher asked the student,

not the parent, if she wanted to come and live in the teachers' compound. In this case, the student did not come to live with the Head Teacher. However, the resistance came from the head of the extended family, not the mother or father. This also gives an indication of the status of the Head Teacher, that a high status male leader questioned her decision, not the students' parents.

In a society organized around specified roles and hierarchy, it was understandable that parents would see teachers as having the primary responsibility for education and their own role would be more limited. The status of the teachers put them in the position of making educational decisions regarding their students even when parents were present.

It may also be that parents recognized the efficacy of giving teachers the responsibility for formal education. From research in Guyana, Saha (1983) proposes that where a discontinuity exists between the indigenous culture and the school culture, the determinants of school achievement will differ from those in developed countries. Whereas research in developed countries indicates the importance of parental involvement in student achievement, this may not be true in developing countries where traditional knowledge is not represented in the academic curricula.

Thus, family members, religious leaders, village elders, and age peers cannot provide the cultural enrichment and reinforcement needed for school achievement even though they might provide encouragement. On the other hand, the teachers who are in effect "outsiders" to the traditional cultures, and who impart nontraditional perspectives and knowledge, are virtually the only sources of school knowledge and thus control access to it. The teachers' unique role in the mastery of this knowledge cannot be overestimated, and the more competent the teacher, the greater impact on student achievement. (p.86)

While not verbalizing this logic, it appeared that Totokan parents had accepted that teachers had a greater role in promoting and supporting their child's academic success

than they as parents could have. As discussed earlier in this chapter the parents separated the Western skills taught in the school from the Fijian skills that they felt they could teach at home. Their role as a parent, then, became one of giving the teacher even greater latitude to direct their children's formal education and make educational decisions on their behalf.

### *Differentiated Roles Due to Tradition and Status*

This analysis shows that parent involvement in educational activities is very different in a traditional society where hierarchical status is recognized. In a developed country such as Canada, parent involvement is expected to include volunteer activities in the classroom as well as parent involvement with students' studies in the home. It appeared that because the cultural traditions of the school were so different from the traditions that were still prevalent in village life, this community left the instruction of Western culture and formal academic skills to teachers in the school system. Parents in Totoka separated their role from that of the teachers as well as separating the skills they were prepared to teach their children from the skills that they expected the teachers to teach in the school.

Another aspect of the limited role that parents had in this school was the importance of status in their society. Rather than being a partnership between parent and teacher, which is a common model in North America, parent involvement was constrained by the difference in status between parents and teachers. For some, their own experience of boarding schools when they were students reinforced the centrality of the teachers' role over the parental role in educational activities. The difference in status allowed teachers to take on a greater role in decision making in a student's educational life, in effect taking on the role of the parent in many cases.

## **Community Involvement**

The previous section presented information on the limited role that parents in Totoka had regarding their children's achievement in school. The status of teachers, differentiated hierarchical roles in the society, and a tradition of boarding schools were all factors that determined the educational activities in which parents were involved in Totoka. It appeared that in this context, teachers were seen as having much more impact on student achievement than parents or community.

Nevertheless, Totoka Village School was a community school and community members were actually very involved in various school activities. These were not activities that were directly related to curriculum and instruction; they were not creating local resources for use in the classroom or involved in assisting the teacher with instruction. Instead, community members were active on various committees, involved in the maintenance of the school, as well as many fundraising activities. In contrast to North America where community involvement in schools is often explained by its potential for a positive effect on student achievement, this study found that the community members of Totoka were more likely to participate in school activities because of relationships, traditions, and status.

### *The Rugby Tournament*

The rugby tournament created discussion within the community about people's involvement in school events because it was such a large event organized as a school fundraiser. Not only did the grounds need to be prepared and the tournament organized, but 400 players also had to be housed and fed in the villages. With the number of people

in the villages doubling in size as well as hosting 300 - 500 people attending to watch the games, every villager's help was needed. Most of the reasons that people were involved or were not involved in school activities became apparent during this tournament.

My research notes at the beginning of the introductory chapter give an idea of how the tournament took over the entire island for four days and the kinds of activities in which villagers were involved. Boys gathered firewood and dug cassava. Men transported supplies by boat, built the *vakatunaloa* shelters, and organized the games. Women and girls cooked, fed the teams, and washed dishes. The older men conducted welcoming ceremonies and entertained dignitaries. Anyone who lived in Totoka or was from Totoka and had a wage income was asked for a cash donation to buy supplies, but all families contributed produce or labour.

Well - most families. Although I thought that the tournament was well supported by the community, some of the men organizing the event talked to me afterwards about difficulties. Anare said that originally the elders didn't support the tournament. Some villagers didn't help on the first day but once they saw the tournament happening they went over to the school to join in. Kali said that the villagers didn't do their part so there wasn't enough firewood and cassava. Akuila, the chairman of the school committee, had to send some boys to dig cassava on the morning of the tournament.

It's difficult to understand why there would not be overwhelming support for a fundraiser for the local school. As Seriana, who helped with the cooking said when asked why she helped "Because it's our school and our children go." The people of Totoka supported education, they were proud that they had a school on their island, and even young people without children were expected and were willing to contribute to the

education of their younger siblings, nieces, and nephews. The reasons that community members did or did not participate in school events lay deep within Fijian culture and the importance of relationships that were strengthened through traditions and status.

### *The Importance of Relationships*

In his study of Fijian villages in 1954, Nayacakalou discussed how the Fijian economic system was based on social organization (1978, pp. 115-121). "Labour is given not as an economic service, but as a social one" (p. 115). Relationships directed how labour was mobilized and how work-groups were organized. Thus incentives for work were based on one's role within a group and the obligation of one's group to another. These incentives appeared to continue to operate within the community of Totoka almost 50 years later.

While some people, like Seriana, helped with the tournament because they wanted to support the school, much of the effort was as a result of obligations of relationship. When Akuila asked some boys to go to their gardens and harvest cassava for the meals, those boys would have been his nephews, who would be obligated to follow his instructions. Esiteri used a similar strategy to get the playing field mowed, when she asked young men from the next village to mow the grass. She explained that her grandmother was from the village and so she could tell them to come and work for her. She used her relationship as an "aunt" with these men to compel them to do the work.



In a society with an economic system based on relationships rather than monetary reward,<sup>17</sup> what would be considered volunteer labour in North America was organized along social or kinship lines. This explains why the school committee in Totoka was not composed of representatives from each of the villages, but rotated among the villages with membership all from one village. When this research was conducted, Akuila, the school committee chairman, was from the old village and his committee was made up of young men from the same *mataqali* or kinship group in that village. These were young men who were related to Akuila and thus bound by relationship to help Akuila in the work for the school. The people from other *mataqali* were not equally obligated to help Akuila in this work.

By contrast, the resort had a board of directors made up all of the male leaders in the community. Every person on the island and almost all of the people who worked at the resort were related to at least one of the men on the board. While the people who worked at the resort were normally paid a wage, shortly after the coup, when tourism dropped drastically, the resort was not able to pay its workers. The board cut the workers' hours and eventually asked them to continue to work for free. Because of their personal obligations to the board members, the workers continued to work for weeks without a wage and the resort stayed open. I believe it unlikely that they would have continued working for the resort itself, but the board of directors was able to keep the resort open because of their personal relationships to the workers.

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that Fijians never expect to be paid money for work. Even in 1954, Nayacakalou recognized that Fijians were operating under two economic systems: a Western monetary system and the Fijian social system. But even paid work was influenced by the social structure of the society.

While people in the villages might be obligated to work due to their personal relationship to members of the resort board, the Head Teacher or the chair of the school committee, they were not similarly obligated to work for the school itself. The school was outside of the social structure of the society. No-one was obligated traditionally through relationship to commit labour to the school and school events, only to individuals who may have positions within the education system.

### *Following Tradition*

Beyond the immediate family, it was the elders who organized work within and between groups. Nayacakalou refers to a common saying that translates as “it is the will of the elders” (1978, p. 119). Much work was done by young men and women upon the direction of their elders. So Kali’s comment that originally the elders did not support the tournament takes on greater significance. Without the elders coming together, issuing their support of the tournament, and their directive to work for the tournament, there was less incentive for the young workers to comply with the school committee’s requests for help.

One reason why the elders did not support the tournament became apparent as I talked to more people about helping at the tournament. Selina, a young mother with sisters at the school, thought that the tournament fund-raiser was Totoka’s job. That year the school committee was from Totoka. Selina went on to explain that there is competition between villages, making it difficult for the villages to work together. She said “Before the chief would talk to the men and Tai Ana would talk to the women.” Years ago, when there was only one village on the island, all of the elders would gather, make a decision, and then the male and female leaders of the village (the chief and Tai

Ana) would tell the villagers what was to be done. Now that the villagers are separated into three villages, these traditional lines of communication have broken down. Seldom did the elders from all three villages, all three *mataqalis*, meet together. In the case of the rugby tournament, the meeting of the elders and the ensuing directive from the leaders did not happen.

Kali supported Selina explanation saying that there was a conflict between Akuila, who is from Totoka, and the *Turaga Ni Koro*, who lives in another village. Traditionally, announcements regarding village activities would be made for the chief or the elders by the *Turaga ni Koro*. It appeared that information about the rugby tournament came from Akuila and the school committee but did not go through the *Turaga ni Koro*. In an interview, the *Turaga ni Koro* explained that often people did not help at the school because the announcement did not go through him.

Because the school belongs to the village, if they want something they should ask the *Turaga ni Koro* and he will ask the village. The main thing, the school committee did not ask the *Turaga ni Koro*.

There was only one *Turaga ni Koro* who resided in one village but was responsible for making announcements in all three villages. It was difficult for communication to take place between the three villages while at the same time maintaining traditional protocols.

A discussion with the Head Teacher about communication further illustrates the difficulties of satisfying traditions and respecting the hierarchy while getting information to the community members.

Marilyn: What is the traditional way of communicating?  
Esiteri: Call a village meeting once a month and everyone was there. They decide whatever issues come up. They collectively agreed like building thatched *bures*. So and so: you go and get this. They have

different things to do. And work collectively. Now, divided into 3 [villages].

Marilyn: How do they communicate now?

Esiteri: The *Turaga ni Koro* sends a message to the other villages to have a meeting. But only about 6 people will be there. We couldn't put this to a village meeting because no quorum. [The village elder] is supposed to call the *Vanua* meetings. He sends word to [the school chairman]. Or [the school chairman] tells [the village elder] to have a meeting. Then the *Turaga ni Koro* informs the villages of the date.

Once again, the issue of communication to the three villages comes up. The traditional line of communication through the *Turaga ni Koro* had never changed to accommodate the physical change from one village to three. The hierarchies of the society required a number of levels of leadership, from school chairman through the village elder on to the *Turaga ni Koro*, who then passed the information on to the people in the village. The physical situation on the island of three separated villages with no telephone or easy communication made it very difficult for all of these people to be contacted and the information passed on.

The traditional lines of communication had not changed to accommodate the relatively new institution of the village school. The Head Teacher said that she tried to work within the traditional structure, getting word to each of the three village elders and their spokesmen. However, she felt that "the circulars are more effective because it's all in detail and [the parents] know what is required." Given that the population was literate, all parents could read the circulars which were written in Fijian. The difficulty was that people in the village, especially the elders, could be affronted when the traditional ways were not followed, resulting in lack of support for school functions. Despite the fact that the traditional manner of making announcements was not working, working outside of the traditions was not widely accepted either.

## *Maintaining Status*

Nayacakalou also mentions the force of public opinion, which determined status, as an incentive to work (1978, p. 119). As Nayacakalou explains, if Fijians did not fulfill their obligations and maintain their status, they would find themselves without assistance when they required it. In Fijian society, beyond the status of individuals, there was the status of the family and the status of the larger group, in this case the island of Totoka to consider. Competition was a large part of Fijian social activities, as each group tried to outdo each other. "It may be housebuilding, or it may be contributions into the church funds. Each group is anxious to see that it does not come last and, if possible, to be best" (Ibid, p. 120).

This competition between *mataqali* helps explain the attitude towards the school committee. Whereas it may be expected that everyone would want to help the school committee because it served the school where all of their children attended, instead people often sat back to watch if the committee would fail in their endeavors. The school committee was organized by *mataqali*, with a different *mataqali* taking on the job at the beginning of this research. Comparisons were carefully made to determine which *mataqali* had done the best job.

The *mataqali* in the newer village had been responsible for the school committee for several years and the old village had recently taken on the job. Tai Uraia, a male elder from the new village told about problems knowing what the school committee was doing, comparing the current school committee with the committee from his own village.

Tai Uraia: All the committee is from [the old village]. They don't tell the other villages.

Marilyn: Was last year better, when the committee was from [the new village]?

Tai Uraia: Yes. There was a meeting. They got the water tank, the teachers' houses. This year the committee has only done the fence.

Besides comparing the operation of the school committee, the achievements of different school committees were often compared, as Tai Uraia had done. The status of the *mataqali* was increased by the achievements of their school committee.

This competition between *mataqali* was not always good for the school as people held to the status of their *mataqali* over their responsibility to the school. They thought of themselves as members of their *mataqali* not members of the school community supporting the school committee and hence they worked for their *mataqali* not for the school committee. Many people understood the rotating school committee to mean that working for the school also shifted from *mataqali* to *mataqali*. Seriana, who was from the new village, explained how she thought it worked:

This year [the old village], it's their time to support the school. Last year [the new village] supported it very well.

This was a common understanding: that those people who belonged to the *mataqali* of the school committee would contribute their labour to school maintenance and projects. Therefore, many people from the other two *mataqali* stood by and watched the school committee from the third *mataqali* to see if their projects, such as the rugby tournament, would be successful.

The funds raised by the rugby tournament were compared by some to the *solu* that had been held as a fundraiser in a previous year. A *solu* was a traditional form of raising funds that capitalized on this competition between *mataqali*. Every family donated money and a careful record was kept as to who donated how much. Family members on the mainland or working overseas were contacted and told to send money. At the end, a

tally was done to see which *mataqali* contributed the most to the *solu*. While contributing the most money to the school, the winning *mataqali* also contributed substantially to its own status.

While there was competition for status between the three *mataqali* on the island, there was also competition between Totoka and the neighbouring islands. It was important to everyone on the island that the reputation of the community be upheld. It was important, therefore, when Larry pointed out that people waited to see what was happening and then they joined in to support the rugby tournament on the second day. Once they saw that it was a big event with lots of people from the other islands, they offered their help to ensure that Totoka's status was maintained.

### *Using Relationships, Status, and Traditions*

The school was an outside institution in Totoka. Based primarily on the British school system, it was not functionally integrated into Fijian society. The school was not part of the system of relationships, status, and traditions that supported Fijian social structure and economy. Fijians served on the local school committee and knew the Fijian social structure, but they were willing to accept the Western structures such as school committees that were based on a foreign societal structure. Unfortunately, leaving cultural traditions behind was more difficult.

The Education Act of 1978 recommends a "Fijian management style" (cited in Williams, 2000, p. 202), but I have found no description of what that might look like. Williams does not expand on that particular point. The Blueprint for Affirmative Action on Fijian Education, which might be expected to support a Fijian management style

because of its pro-Fijian tone, recommends training for school managers, but does not suggest a change to the school committee structure. Anani, while writing about the traditional African chieftaincy as an “indigenous organizational principle of leadership,” highlights the need for

well thought out procedures by which the indigenous structures of governance of the community resource bases can be devoted and incorporated into modern day administrative practices. (1999, p. 61)

There are no guidelines for communities such as Totoka that are trying to accommodate the modern school committee structure within the traditional organization of the Fijian village.

The most successful school projects in Totoka were those that drew upon Fijian relationships, raised the status of families and *mataqali*, and followed the Fijian traditions. A number of people in Totoka referred to the *solu* as a very successful school fund-raiser. Traditionally, families would have contributed fish, yams, and mats but the *solu* had been updated to be a collection of money. However, most of the traditions of the *solu* were maintained and a successful *solu* still relied on related groups competing to maintain and increase status.

The *solu* that reportedly raised a considerable sum for the school happened before I arrived in Totoka. While I heard a number of positive accounts of the fundraiser, I did not hear any complaints about it or an explanation as to why the school committee had changed to a rugby tournament as their major fundraiser. The Methodist Church in Fiji, however, was re-thinking the use of the *solu*, because it was too successful. Communities from all over Fiji raised money to be publicly presented at the annual meeting and the amount that was presented was a major indication of the status of the community. Huge



amounts were raised through this method, but the church was aware that communities were raising money from families that could not afford the large cash donations that were being given. Families were undergoing severe hardship so that the status of their *mataqali* was maintained during the *solu*.

Because of the changes happening in Fiji, such as the introduction of a monetary economy, traditions have also had to change. Traditions in Totoka did not change as quickly as other parts of their society. While the original village had grown into three villages, the traditions of communicating from the chief and elders to the villagers had not changed to accommodate the geographical distances. Nevertheless, those in the village who respected the traditional ways, especially the elders who carried a lot of authority, wanted the traditional ways to be followed. The inability for traditions to accommodate the current conditions made it difficult for the school committee and the head teacher to communicate effectively with the villagers.

The school, although managed and staffed by Fijians, operated through a different culture than the traditional Fijian culture. Where the school was able to work through the Fijian system of relationships, status and traditions there was less conflict and the school projects were more successful.

### **Accountability**

Community involvement is recommended by many policy makers with the assumption that community involvement increases accountability. Reforms recommended by aid organizations and national governments include local governance structures with the hope that local control will ensure that educational funds are spent

effectively (for a review of a number of these reforms see Uemura, 1999). Theoretically, the local people will hold accountable those responsible for money management as well as holding teachers accountable for their attendance at the school.

This research in the community of Totoka found a number of factors that limited the ability of local control to ensure this accountability, particularly significant in traditional, hierarchically organized communities. In these societies, relationships, status, and traditions are as important as any Western standards of accountability.

### *Money Management*

Similar to the Fijian accommodation of traditional and Western senses of labour that was discussed earlier, the people of Totoka also combined Western fiscal responsibility with traditional Fijian obligations to relationships and status. The people of Totoka understood that they were accountable for the money raised for the school, but they were also subject to the fulfillment of familial and community obligations.

Many people in the community were involved in the management of money at Totoka Village School. Similar to most schools in Fiji, a school committee comprised of men from the community managed the school. This committee was responsible for the management of the grant money from the government as well as raising other funds necessary for the operation and maintenance of the school. There were a Parent Teacher Association and a Mothers Club that both operated independently of the school committee, raising money and spending it as they wished. The teachers also raised money for a separate fund that they controlled.

The school committee was accountable to the Ministry of Education and a financial report was sent at the end of the school year. The year-end report (Table 3) gives some indication of the monies raised and how they were spent. This financial accounting was also given by the Head Teacher with her report to community members at the school year-end ceremony.

Table 3 School Committee Financial Report 2000

Income		Expenses	
Fee Free Grant	3990.00	Stationery	2050.70
Fund Raising	5471.75	Fencing	2000.00
Donations	771.00	School Maintenance and Painting	2500.00
Captain Cook	800.64	Photocopier	350.00
Building Fund	276.00	Generator Maintenance	1160.00
		Boarding Class 6 & 8	450.00
Total Income	11309.39	Compound Maintenance	450.00
Less Expenses	9810.70	Transport (boat) etc	500.00
Income over Expenses	1498.69	Prize Giving	200.00
		Teachers FTA Meet	150.00
		Total Expenses	9810.70

One of the teachers commented that because the villagers were poorly educated they were not concerned about financial reports:

They're in the village and they don't have the care. In urban, they are more educated and want to know where the money goes.

However, the comments from community members during interviews indicated that they were interested in how the school committee was spending the money. Maikali, a father, complained:

They don't put it in the book. At the end of the year, everyone, all the village must be there. The chairman must put it in the book when they use the money.

The rounded numbers indicate he had some valid concerns: it is unlikely that the expense for the maintenance and painting, for example, was exactly \$2500. The villagers knew that the money was not accurately accounted for. The World Bank Participation Sourcebook states that the "misuse of funds" is one of the risks of local participation in many developing countries (Colletta & Perkins, 1995).

Just as important as the paper accounting, the people in the village could look at the school and see whether the money was being spent on improvements. Before year-end when the above report was presented, Maciu expressed his concerns during an interview:

- Maciu: I'm concerned about the fund-raising on now. For example, in the last 3 months every 2 weeks there is fundraising for the school, but didn't see any improvement.
- Marilyn: What fundraising?
- Maciu: Like the tournament and buying food [a cash BBQ at the school].
- Marilyn: You don't know how the money was spent?
- Maciu: Don't see improvement. Maybe keep in the bank.

The community members were interested in seeing how the money was spent, not in reading a year-end report. They could see that a year after the rugby tournament, where money was raised to build a fence, only half of the schoolyard was fenced off, using fencing donated by Captain Cook Cruiselines and posts cut from the forest. They had physical proof that the \$2000 in the annual report had not built a fence.

The problem of misused funds was not restricted to that year's school committee. There were questions regarding how the previous school committee spent money for a generator. I was told that the PTA money as well as the money raised for the kindergarten by the mothers club had also disappeared. Even the money that the teachers had raised for

school expenses had been borrowed by the teachers themselves. Nor was the loss of funds limited to Totoka. Tavola writes that the “mismanagement and misappropriation of school funds have been endemic in rural schools” (2000a, p.176). In the case of the funds in Totoka, the money had been requested by other community members for necessary family expenses.

Traditionally, Fijian communities had subsistence economies that relied on sharing within kinship groups to ensure distribution of resources.

Fijian village resource allocation is based on the ideal of sharing and caring for each other, in proportion to closeness of relationship.... A person is encouraged to embark on an enterprise or allowed to use certain natural resources in the hope that others will share the fruits of his labour. (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 176)

Totoka, to a great extent, still operated on this subsistence, sharing economy. So, for example, when someone in the village caught a great number of fish, the catch would be shared among the entire family and even the larger village community if possible.

A mango tree and even the coconut trees along the beach belonged to someone, but when there was an abundance of fruit, it was shared with others.

Therefore, in a community where cash was in short supply, a large amount of cash raised through a raffle or the rugby tournament was a valuable community commodity. It was difficult for families with little cash income to amass the amount of cash necessary to pay secondary school bills, buy food for house builders, or hold a family ceremony. Because there was no bank on the island and few villagers had bank accounts, someone in the community would hold the cash from a fundraising event. People, especially family members, would approach that person and *kerekere* the money they required. It would be very difficult for the “treasurer” to refuse the request.

In the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel Report, Williams (2000, p.201) suggests that the training of school managers and clear expectations laid out in a school management handbook would alleviate the problem. This study of Totoka, however, raises questions as to whether training would solve the problem of missing funds, because the funds were not actually missing, but had been redistributed through the community. Nayacakalou refers to the Western concept of money as the “depersonalization of economic relations” (1978, p. 117), which is at odds with the traditional Fijian economic system based on relationships. The Western concept of accountability is measured by a financial statement that properly accounts for the money. In Fiji, Nayacakalou contends, “the carrying out of social obligations often conflicts with the demands of a monetary economy” (p. 130). The people of Totoka who served on the school committee were also accountable to their relatives and community members.

There is a tension within the community of Totoka, between Western fiscal responsibility and the traditional obligations to relationships. This was evident in an interview with three, well-educated young women; after a bit of discussion they decided that a 50% disappearance rate was acceptable. That is, they would be happy if 50% of the money went to family and community requests leaving 50% of the money to the project for which the money was raised. This is not a standard that would likely be agreeable to aid organizations or the Ministry of Education.

### *Traditions*

Besides the commitment to family and community obligations, there were other Fijian traditions that were seen by some people as inappropriate expenditures of school money or unnecessary loss of school time. While I was at Totoka, the two traditions that

were in conflict with accountability standards were the loss of class time for traditional ceremonies and the purchase of kava with school funds.

An issue often raised regarding education in developing countries is that of cancelling classes, most often due to teacher absence (Uemera, 1999). More community involvement in the education system is hoped to place pressure on the teachers to fulfill their obligations. Community members in Totoka did notice when classes were cancelled and indirectly raised questions about teacher absences. However, it was observed that traditional ceremonies also necessitated removing children from school or even cancelling school. Community involvement did not necessarily ensure that classes were held and community traditions increased the number of instruction days that were cancelled.

Traditional ceremonies were community events to which a great deal of time was devoted. When an elder of Totoka died, the head of that family sent word to the Head Teacher that fundraising planned for that week was to be cancelled. A parents' meeting planned to be held on the day of the death was also cancelled. School was cancelled for the day of the funeral. One of the teachers, in frustration, commented that Fijians would always be "left" behind if they continued to place traditions ahead of their children's schooling.

Another tradition that was an issue throughout Fiji was the use of *kava* at schools. As mentioned before, the *kava* ceremony was an important part of Fijian culture. Almost every school event in Totoka such as parent meetings and school prize-giving included a *kava* ceremony. Since children did not take part in the ceremony, *kava* was not a part of the children's activity. Before and after the prize-giving, the male elders and the school

committee chairman would drink *kava* in one of the teachers' houses or in an empty classroom. During the exams, the men would gather under the trees, around a *kava* bowl.

In some schools in Fiji, teachers would drink *kava* during school time, leaving their classroom unattended (Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel, 2000, p.169). In a school that I visited on the mainland, I was invited to speak to one of the classes. Shortly after the beginning of the class, the teacher left the classroom and did not return. As I was leaving the school, I saw the teacher sitting with another man, drinking *kava*. As a result of the prevalence of missed instruction time due to *kava* sessions, the Ministry of Education issued a memo to schools banning the drinking of *kava* in schools. This level of misuse was not apparent at Totoka during the time that I was in the community. It is important to note, however, that all of the teachers except one were women. Since for the most part, women do not spend as much time drinking *kava* as do the men, this may have been a major factor in the absence of the problem during school hours in Totoka.

While school time was not devoted to *kava*, school money certainly was. The school financial report above does not indicate the amount of money that was spent on *kava*. However, it would have been purchased for the prize-giving ceremony. Any group activity, such as building the fence would have concluded with *kava*. After the rugby tournament, the school committee went to each village and held a *kava* ceremony to thank the villagers for their help. The *kava* would have been purchased using the money raised during the tournament. Enough *kava* to ensure a village was appropriately thanked would cost at least \$60, so almost \$200 would be spent from the tournament's profits in ceremonies at the three villages.



Non-Fijians may see the expenditure on *kava* as an improper expenditure of school money. Even within the Fijian community, there was criticism about spending money on *kava* rather than on supplies for students. However, traditions such as the *kava* ceremony were an important part of Fijian culture. In Totoka, any community event was accompanied by the *kava* ceremony, which indicated the importance of the event and the support of the elders of the community. Therefore, what some would view as an inappropriate expenditure of school monies, would be an appropriate expense within the context of the traditions of the community culture.

### *Hierarchichal Status*

The Western notion of accountability presumes that there is some person or body to whom one is accountable, some person or body that evaluates and questions reports made to it. In community-school relations, the schools, the teachers and the management are expected to be accountable to community members, particularly parents. The move to community involvement assumes that members of the community will want to and will be able to ask questions, ensuring that resources are efficiently used towards quality education.

In a review of education projects for the World Bank, Uemara (1999) lists “increasing accountability” as one of the rationales for community participation in education. “Parental involvement in education, particularly in school governance, is seen as a means of making schools more accountable to the society which funds them”(p. 4). Parents’ meetings and reporting systems are given as essential methods to ensure this accountability. However, Uemera notes that this model of accountability to the community, developed in OECD countries, relies on a relationship between school

management and community members that is based on a “market-oriented concept.”

Citing a study in developing countries, Uemera adds that accountability relies on the community holding some power over teachers and school staff (Rugh & Bossert 1998 in Uemera, 1999), either through social ties or consumer satisfaction.

This study found that the hierarchical status structures in the community of Totoka limited the ability of community members to question actions by either teachers or the school committee. The status of both the teachers and the school committee was such that most community members had no power to ensure accountability.

In some interviews the issue of what happened to the money raised for the school was mentioned and gave me an opportunity to ask how the interviewee would voice concerns. Two young women, one a mother of a school-age child, wondered where fundraising money was spent.

- Marilyn: Who would you ask?  
Kuini: The chairman! [Josifini laughs at this.]  
Marilyn: Would you ask the Head Teacher?  
Josifini: No.  
Kuini: She's afraid to ask the teachers.  
Josifini: No, I would ask Mareta. [A teacher from the mainland who had been in the community a long time.] I ask her about Sai's schooling; is it good, bad, too much playing.  
Marilyn: Would you ask Mareta about the money?  
Josifini: No.  
Marilyn: Would [male elders in the village] ask?  
Josifini: No.

Both the Head Teacher and the chairman had high status in Totoka, higher than Josifini.

There was also the added distance of gender between Josifini and the chairman. She felt more comfortable talking to a female teacher of lower status, but even then did not feel comfortable asking about matters of money. It was not clear why Josifini thought that the

male elders would not ask about the money, but this conversation indicates the difficulty that community members had in asking teachers how money was being spent.

Maciu, a well-educated young father, described a process which he believed was how concerns should be raised.

- Marilyn: Who would you talk to if you had a concern?  
Maciu: To the chairman [of the school committee] because he's in charge of everything.  
Marilyn: What if you had a concern about the teaching?  
Maciu: Talk to the elders first. And the elders can call for a village meeting and invite the chairman to come over and negotiate the problem with the chairman. So the chairman can take it over to the teachers. Or have any idea of the teachers to negotiate with the elders in a meeting.  
Marilyn: Has this ever happened that you know?  
Maciu: No, but the process is there.

As Maciu mentioned, it did not seem that this process was ever followed. He himself wondered how the fund-raising money was being spent because he had not seen improvements at the school. But he had not raised these concerns with the chairman.

I talked to Maikali, a male leader in the community, one of the elders to whom Maciu thought concerns should be taken. He had expressed a concern to me about the number of days that the teachers were absent from school.

- Marilyn: So you would take your concerns to the Head Teacher?  
Maikali: Yes and the Education Officer to find out if the Head Teacher is telling the truth. They have sick days and leave. Most of the people, I hear from them, when [the teachers] go out they come back late. The parents say this.  
Marilyn: They express their concerns to you?  
Maikali: Yes. But we don't know the truth. If [the teachers] have extra school hours that's good but if they just go and come back late, not [i.e., not good.]  
Marilyn: Are most parents expressing their concerns to you?  
Maikali: They would just [motion keeping the mouth shut.] It's the problem with Fijian society; they are too shy to ask. Most people won't tell you, but to tell the others.

Maikali refers to Fijians' reluctance to directly confront someone, but instead to tell someone else. In this case, even he, a male elder, was reluctant to question the Head Teacher. Besides her status as Head Teacher, Esiteri was also from a chiefly family, giving her higher status than most people on the island.

It happened that the chairman of the school committee, Esiteri's brother, was also of very high status, from a chiefly family. Tavola found that in Fiji, where often the chief was the chair of the school committee, mismanagement of school funds was tolerated "because it is taboo to question the motives and actions of high chiefs" (1991, p. 99). In Totoka, the status of both the Head Teacher and the chair of the school committee made it very difficult, if not impossible, for parents to raise questions about the management of the school.

This restriction was made even clearer to me during a meeting of the school committee. I had written up a report for the chairman that summarized some of the issues that had arisen during my interviews in the community. I had tried to make sure that the report was not critical of the actions of the current or previous school committees, but discussed the structure, that everyone, including school committee chairmen had found no longer worked with the changing village structure. The introduction of the report included this paragraph on communication:

Improving the communication between the school committee and the three villages will help the community know how they can help the committee and the school. Some people offered ways the system could be improved. I have also made some suggestions. Which ones will work for Totoka?

When I showed the report to the chairman, he indicated that he was interested in the following suggestion in the report:

Tell the community what the plans are for the year. The committee decides which projects are to be completed during the year. The villages are told what the projects for the year are, what they will cost, how the money will be raised, and who is responsible for the work. The committee organizes the project and reports on the work done.

However, when I presented this report to a meeting of the school committee, a committee member, not the chairman, quite vehemently told me that because they were appointed, they did not have to report to the community. Their appointment by the chief and the elders gave them the status of the chief and the elders, status above most of the parents and other community members. While the current chairman had the status of being from a chiefly family, any school committee chairman would have status within the community because he was appointed by the chief and elders.

There are ways in Fijian society for people to make their concerns known indirectly to the people in power. As Maikali said, Fijians won't tell you but they will tell others. In the case of his concern about teachers being absent from school, the Head Teacher became aware of the community's questions when someone on the mainland asked her about the problem. She did not hear of it from anyone from the community, but in a very indirect manner learned that community members were questioning the number of days that teachers were absent.

This example shows how the community could let the Head Teacher and the school committee know that they were unhappy about their decisions and actions. But, in general, the high status of those positions prevented the community from directly questioning them or holding them accountable.

### *A Different Accountability*

With large amounts of aid dollars going towards education in developing countries, aid organizations are holding developing countries accountable for how these funds are spent. National governments, in turn, are holding local officials more accountable. The theory that community involvement in education will ensure accountability is widely accepted. However, this theory is flawed in its application to traditional, hierarchical communities; indeed it might be counterproductive.

The importance of relationships, status, and traditions affected the way in which the community was able to hold someone accountable. Depersonalized measures of accountability were different from traditional Fijian economics that were based on personal relationships. People in Totoka were more accountable to their family and other members of the community than they were to government officials. The community expected traditional ceremonies to be honoured, thus requiring a commitment of time and money. Decisions made by high-status members of the community could not be questioned.

Both the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel, 2000) and the Ministry of Education's *Blueprint for Fijian Education* (2000) recommend training for school committees, teaching Fijians how to meet the requirements of the school system. Training in goal-setting, financial management, and effective communication are recommended, but if the underlying community structures are not openly acknowledged and discussed, the conflict between the two systems will continue.

## **Relationships, Status, and Traditions**

This analysis of interviews and observations in the community of Totoka has shown how parent and community involvement in education was influenced by relationships, status, and traditions. Parents' direct involvement in classroom activities was limited by the high status of teachers, as well as the teachers' greater knowledge and expertise in the formal and informal curriculum in the school. Therefore, teachers took on a greater role than parents in students' academic lives as students often lived in hostels supervised by the teachers or even lived in the teachers' homes.

How and to what extent community members were involved in school activities was also bound by their personal relationships, the involvement of those of higher status, and how well the school personnel followed traditional protocols. School activities were successful in involving community members if they were organized to take advantage of Fijian cultural traditions and societal structure.

Accountability in Totoka was very different from a Western sense of accounting for money as well as work time. Because economic and social interactions were so inextricably linked, money management was influenced by traditional obligations to relationships and status. Money had to be used to conduct traditions such as kava ceremonies that could be criticized as not being directly benefitting students. Status of committee chairmen and teachers made it very difficult for most community members to question their decisions. In any case, the importance of maintaining relationships in this traditional society reduced the efficacy of raising complaints about people in positions of status.

## 7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study, in considering the complex relations between school and community in developing countries, found that an adequate discussion of the community's interests in education is missing. As a result, the theories that exist regarding the connections between school and community do not accurately predict or explain the decisions made by parents and community members or their resulting behaviours (Colclough, 1993; Lynch, 1997; World Bank, 1995). The questions that needed to be answered were (a) what are the factors that motivate or inhibit community members in their support of the local school and (b) how are the various interests of parents, educators, community members and international agencies communicated and negotiated?

I drew upon existing theories of community participation in education (Epstein, 1992; Shaeffer, 1994) to develop a comprehensive model of the possible interactions between school and community. The resulting categories of attitude, communication, involvement, governance, and collaboration guided my data collection and ensured that my study reflected the multi-faceted connections between school and community. As a result, my study provides a more complete understanding of the complexities of the relations between school and community than what is present in the existing literature.

The review of the literature presented in Chapter 2 showed there is little understanding of how or why community members support or do not support education. Instead of recognizing the interests that influence a local community's support of education, the focus in the literature is on how educators view the connections between school and community, reflecting their own interests in education (Colclough, 1993; Haddad & Demsky, 1994; Uemara, 1999). There are two theories that guide educators'



understandings of these connections. The first is that education is an important part of the economic and social development of a community (Carnoy & Samoff, 1990; Gannicott, 1990; Lynch, 1997). The second theory is that increased community involvement in education will improve the effectiveness and the efficiency of the education being delivered (Epstein, 1992; Kochar & Gopal, 1997; Thaman, 1991).

My two-year ethnographic study of a community in Fiji shows that these existing theories do not adequately account for conditions in a traditional hierarchical community with a largely subsistence economy. My analysis of this community shows that relationships, status, and tradition are important factors affecting the interactions between this school and this community. Educators and personnel in national departments of education as well as international agencies need to understand the importance of these factors as they set educational policy on interactions between school and community. It is also necessary that community leaders acknowledge the importance of these factors and recognize how they affect the decisions made in their community.

In the next section I first discuss how relationships, status, and traditions have a significant impact on the interactions between school and community; they can promote or inhibit community members' support of education and educational activities. This study shows that because educators seldom recognize the factors influencing community members or how the educational interests of local stakeholders may be different than the purposes defined by educational theories, varying interests are seldom communicated and negotiated. Following this discussion of important factors, I present the implications of these factors when communicating and negotiating educational interests.

Recommendations for international, national, and local educators, as well as for

community leaders follow. Finally, I conclude with recommendations for further study in the area of community-school relations.

### **The Importance of Relationships, Status, and Traditions**

The framework within which the members of this Fijian community made their decisions, educational and otherwise, was based on relationships, status, and traditions. These were the factors that influenced people's lives and therefore influenced their interactions with the school. Educators working under accepted educational theories that did not recognize this framework came into conflict with local realities that emphasized the importance of hierarchical relationships, respected status, and maintained traditions.

### ***The Limited Role of Education in Economic and Social Development***

A well-accepted educational theory is that education plays an important part in the economic and social development of individuals and therefore communities (Gannicott, 1990; Lynch, 1997). An assumption of this theory is that education should be designed to prepare individuals for work, either vocational or wage employment, that will enable them to contribute to the economy of the community (Haddad & Demsky, 1994; Schultz, 1971). Formal education is also viewed as a means for the social development of a community, preserving the language and culture of indigenous communities while introducing what are hoped to be positive improvements to the community, for example in the areas of health and the environment. My data showed that this theory does not take into account the local realities that influence how community members communicate, invite involvement in school activities or make educational decisions.

First, the theory incorrectly views economic activities as impersonal transactions. In traditional, hierarchical societies such as Fiji, economic and social activities are inextricably linked. Social relationships are the basis of the economic system and they ensure individual's economic security. Status determines the number and strength of the social relationships and therefore economic relationships for entire family units. An increase in status and strengthening of relationships for one individual strengthens the economic security for the entire family. Traditions such as ceremonies reinforce relative status and relationships. My study shows that education has to take account of this system of economics and the existing social structure.

The theory that education is important to economic development is often interpreted as implying that education is the only means to economic security. Education is seen as an individualistic pursuit and educational policies are based on assumptions about economic benefit to the individual; however this study found that families make educational decisions within the larger context of the family unit. Education is only one way of increasing the economic security of individuals and their families. In the context of a subsistence economy, it is not necessary for all of the individuals in a family to receive a formal education; some can make valuable contributions to the economic security of the entire family in other ways, such as subsistence economic activities and strengthening the social relationships of the family. Educational and economic theories that focus solely on improving an individual's economic prospects, without considering the communal aspects of the economy, are not appropriate in this context.

The theory that education is important for economic development can also be flawed if economic development is defined in the narrow sense of wage employment. The result

is a focus on agricultural or vocational programs because jobs in these sectors are readily available. The literature gives examples of the failure of vocational programs (Haddad & Demsky, 1994), but there is little recognition in the literature as to why these programs failed. This study shows how important status can be in educational decision-making. Rather than only providing economic benefits to an individual, education is valued for the status that it brings to an entire family. More status is attached to academic programs than to vocational and agricultural programs. School reforms that put an emphasis on the economic potential of education by instituting non-academic programs are more likely to fail if they do not recognize that education is about gaining status as well as about getting a job.

When parents do not support education programs that are based on this limited view of how education relates to economic development, educators wrongly assume that parents do not value education. As a result, many programs related to community-school interactions focus on teaching community members the importance of education. Workshops tell parents how important education is for the economic and social well-being of their children. Community leaders hear how important education is for the economic and social development of their community. These programs are focussing on an assumed problem of attitude rather than understanding how education is actually perceived by the community.

The theory that education is important for the social development of a community is also fraught with erroneous assumptions about the purposes of education, ignoring the interests of the people to whom education is being provided. Programs that attempt to preserve and strengthen local culture and language fail to recognize the importance in

many communities of the status of learning the English language and western behaviours. In Totoka, the status of speaking English strengthened the relationships that were important for the security of the family.

It is paradoxical that while residents of Totoka want the school system to teach their children the culture and language of a foreign culture they also want the school system to respect and support the traditions of their own culture. This seeming contradiction is explained when the interests of relationships, status, and traditions are taken into consideration. Speaking English increases status, which strengthens relationships. But observing cultural traditions also strengthens relationships. It seems incongruous that the community rejects education in the mother tongue and concomitantly demands that the school incorporate traditional practices; but this makes sense when one considers that the underlying interests are the status and relationships that ensure economic security. Conversely, when the interests of status, relationships and the underlying traditions that support them are ignored, it is impossible to understand and predict how community members will respond to educational programs.

Similarly, educational programs that try to institute social development in the community by changing attitudes and behaviours through the schools are misplaced because they do not recognize the social structure of communities like Totoka. In many cultures, when status is important, children are taught in the village to respect adults and not to question tradition and authority. They are thus unlikely to take what they learn in school, for example in a non-smoking program, into their homes and family and to question the behaviour of their parents and other adults. Social development aimed at changing community behaviours must be instituted through programs which integrate and

support the interests of the community, and work in concert with its established ways of relating.

### *Influences on Effectiveness and Efficiency*

The literature from North America indicates that parent and community member involvement can have a positive impact on the effectiveness of school by improving student achievement (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1987; Epstein, 1992, Ogbu, 1992). Development literature shows a trend towards community involvement in school management under the theory that this involvement will improve the efficiency of the schools. My study shows that the application of these theories to some communities may be limited because of the influence of relationships, status, and traditions.

### *Community Involvement and Effectiveness*

A major component of many programs aimed at improving the interactions between the school and the community is the promotion of parents' involvement in their children's education. This is based on the theory that parent involvement improves student achievement (Epstein, 1992). North American research supports this theory but this study showed the limited application of this theory to schooling in a traditional, hierarchical society where the school system is based on a culture other than the home culture.

The partnership model advocated in many parent involvement programs (Epstein, 1992; Townsend & Elder, 1998) may be inappropriate in hierarchical societies where high status is accorded to teachers. The roles of teachers and parents in Totoka were highly differentiated; in such situations parents are less involved directly in classroom or

homework activities and more focussed on teaching their children proper values and on paying school fees. Teachers, on the other hand, were expected to have expertise in academics as well as in the Western culture of the school. My study indicates the limited effect of parent involvement and instead supports Saha's research in Guyana (1983) illustrating that teachers may have a greater effect on student achievement than parents.

Likewise, educational theories based on Western models of family decision-making do not apply in developing countries, especially if they focus on parents. I found that parents often do not make the educational decisions for their children. Again, this indicates that parent involvement in education is different in a community such as Totoka than in a North American community where parents are expected to be the family members most involved in a child's education. In Totoka, high-status members of the extended family are likely to make educational decisions for a family. Programs which focus on parent involvement in education, ignoring differences of status within the family and community, miss some of the people most responsible for education.

Teachers may also take on greater significance in educational decision-making for students in hierarchical societies. This may be attributed to their high status as well as to a recognition of their expertise within the school system. In countries where parents may have attended boarding schools, theories of parent and community involvement must consider the increased role taken on by teachers.

### *Community Involvement and Efficiency*

Financing education and the accountability for funds has become a major issue in developing countries. Some agencies are recommending policies based on the theory that

greater involvement by the community in the local school will increase support, both financial and in donations of labour, as well as improve accountability for funds given to the school. This study in Totoka raises questions about how much effect community involvement can have on funding and accountability in a community where involvement is based on relationships, status, and traditions.

My research found that community responsibility for school governance does not by itself ensure participation. Involvement by community members in school fund-raising or by donating their labour is based on a complex interplay of relationships and status. The status of having a school situated in their community can increase the potential for participation. However, the school as an institution does not seem to fit into the hierarchical relationships of a community. Individuals did not have obligations to the school in the same way they are obligated to relatives. Therefore the school depends on the status of the individual who is requesting participation and their personal relationships with people in the community. The status of the head teacher or the school committee chairman can be enough to obligate community members to participate; in the same way, the status of community elders confers the ability to encourage or discourage participation in school activities. The theory that community members will be involved in educational activities simply because they support education ignores the reality of status and relationships in communities. Similarly, fund-raising that assumes participation solely because the community supports education will fail. Examples in this study show that fund-raising events that drew upon the traditions of Fijian culture, traditions which increased status and drew upon existing relationships, were the most successful.



As mentioned previously, theories that are based on Western models do not necessarily transfer to other cultures. Educators who rely on patterns and manners of communication that work in North America may find that they are not effective in other cultures. While modern methods of communication such as newsletters may appear to be effective and efficient, traditions may dictate how these communications are received. When traditional routes of communication through community leaders are not used, community members, especially elders, may not support the event. This in turn may affect community members' willingness to participate in school functions.

Western theories of using community involvement to ensure accountability usually require that revenues and expenses be correctly reported and that the person responsible can be questioned about any discrepancies. The high status held by a head teacher and chairman of the school committee makes it difficult for most community members to question them as their high status is to be respected. Although community members may have questions about how money is spent, they are probably not in a position in the community to raise these questions with the school committee or the head teacher. Even elders in the community may not easily question the decisions or actions of someone else because of the importance of maintaining relationships in the community. This study found that because of the cultural prohibitions of directly challenging one another, Western models of accountability are not effective in communities where status and relationships make it very difficult for a community member to hold other community members accountable for school funds.

In communities in developing countries, the importance of relationships and the strong continuation of traditions may also be in conflict with the Western sense of

accountability. Individuals with obligations to other members of the community may be, in effect, accountable to them. These obligations may not be dismissed especially if they are to someone who is related or of high status. The attempt to impose Western models fails to account for the potential cultural conflict between being accountable for funds and traditional obligations of sharing.

This study has clearly shown that relationships, status, and traditions are important factors influencing the motivation of many communities in their support of education. Theories of economic and social development along with educational theories of effectiveness and efficiency that do not take these factors into consideration are improperly applied to these communities.

### **Communicating and Negotiating Interests**

As my review of the literature has shown, while educators and community developers are beginning to understand the local context and the importance of the community's interests regarding education initiatives (for example, LeBlanc, 1990; Schofield, 2003), there is little written about how interests are communicated and negotiated between the community and educators. All too often, when the interests of educators and the community differ, attempts are made to change the community. Instead of determining what type of education people in the community value, programs are instituted to teach people what kind of education is good for them. In the connection between the school and the community, it is often the community that is expected to accommodate the school.

This study has probed the complex connections between a school and a community to find out how the interests of community members and educators are, or are not, communicated and negotiated. It has shown that the interactions between school and community are negatively affected when local, national, and international educators ignore the community members' interests regarding relationships, status, and traditions. This study also found that when educators operate within the existing community framework the interactions between school and community can be more positive.

There is little in the literature to draw upon to understand how educators may use traditional relationships in their attempts to work with communities. Williams recommends that to improve community-school relations, educators "promote personal contact in the community" (1997, pp. 70-71) because of the importance of personal relationships in many communities. Shaeffer (1994) mentions community relationships, but refers to the negative effect on school governance, due to the power struggles that may happen in communities.

There are certainly examples in this study of the negative consequences to educational interests as a result of the importance of relationships. For example, in Totoka, there was a great deal of money raised for the school that ended up being spent on *kava*, for ceremonies that were important in the recognition and maintenance of relationships. Because of the importance of relationships and the rules governing the obligations of those relationships in Fijian society, some money was also given to community members instead of being deposited in the school bank account.

These are examples of the negative effects of relationships, but this study has also shown how relationships are integral to positive interactions between the school and this

community. Parents use relationships to raise the money to pay tuition and other expenses related to sending their children to school. Often the entire extended family may be involved in funding and encouraging a few members of their family in their educational pursuits. School personnel may draw on those relationships to enlist labour and donations for the school. Local educators are in the best position to know how to negotiate support for the school by drawing on relationships in the community.

Status is often presented in the literature in a negative way, focussing on the differences in power and therefore is perceived as something that educators will have to fight against (Shaeffer, 1994). This study has shown how status is used by educators and community members to negotiate their interests. Teachers can use their status to negotiate study time for students, maintenance of the school buildings, or more funding for the school. Teachers who know their own status in the community and know how to acknowledge high-status individuals in the community can ensure that the interactions between school and community are positive.

Traditions greatly affect the interactions between school and community. This study found that when traditions are woven into the planning and execution of school events, there can be a great deal of community support and involvement. Traditional communication patterns can be used effectively to garner community support for school activities. Local teachers who are acquainted with how formal communication takes place in the village and work within that format may be more likely to secure the community support. Care must be taken to include traditional means of ensuring that someone who understands and uses the traditional forms of communication and negotiation does not effectively promote an idea that is not to the advantage of the school or the community.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

While recognizing the factors which influence the educational decisions made by community members is important, educators at all levels must also find ways to work within this framework, using relationships, status and traditions to communicate and negotiate the various interests of educators and community members. There are also implications for community leaders for how they communicate and negotiate their interests with educators as well as with community members. The use of local factors to advance the interests of educators may be seen as manipulative; however, it must be remembered that this is the framework within which community members are living their lives. Outside educators, especially international specialists, will most likely be the neophytes at working within a framework of relationships, status, and local traditions.

It is imperative that local educators recognize the importance of relationships in their interactions with the community. It is to their advantage to maintain and enhance relationships with the community. This may be a particular challenge to secondary school teachers and boarding school teachers who are geographically separated from the community. Visits to the students' communities, organizing parent trips to the school, and getting to know family members who live closer to the school would all be ways to foster closer relationships.

In this study, the school committee chairmen intuitively used personal relationships to enlist labour and donations for school maintenance and fund-raising activities. However, national and international policies and projects most often reflect the view that community members should be involved in educational activities solely because of the value of education. National and international educators must explicitly recognize the

role of personal relationships at the local level and include the role of personal relationships in the design of projects, for example, in training school committee members. Maintenance of relationships was a source of tension in the community with regards to the accountability of school funds. Educators, national and international funding agencies, as well as community leaders must recognize the pressures put on school committee chairmen by personal relationships in the community. Financial training may help chairmen keep track of the money but may not help them counter these pressures. Community leaders, recognizing how school fund-raising has benefitted the entire community, may be able to suggest ways to negotiate both school and community needs.

Rather than trying to ignore, or change, something as important to a community as status, educators must acknowledge that status influences educational decision-making as well as how educational interests are communicated and negotiated in communities. In many countries, the status that can be gained from education ensures that there is a very positive attitude towards education and that parents will go to great lengths to try to give their children the opportunity to attend school. It is important, however, for educators to realize that status is bestowed on the entire family, and not only on the individual. This results in family support for education because, through resulting employment, their interests of meeting relational obligations are fulfilled (Thaman, 1993). The educational benefits to the individual are subordinate to the benefits to the extended family or community. Educators who fail to see education as a family or a community endeavour rather than as an individual pursuit will fail to understand how educational decisions are made.

The importance of status has serious implications for educational reforms regarding language, agricultural, and vocational curricula. Educators have tried in many countries and through many programs to counteract the second-grade status of vocational programs, with little success. Educational policy makers must be aware that education is supported not necessarily for its intrinsic benefits but because of the status that English and academic education provide. Rather than fighting against the interests of status, national and international educators must recognize how status affects educational decision-making, often to the benefit of education, and how to work within the framework of status when communicating and negotiating educational reforms with communities.

Many local educators already know how to use status when working with parents and community members. The high status of teachers allows them to make decisions on behalf of the family regarding a child's education. Because teachers are often the most knowledgeable persons in the community about the school's overt and hidden curricula, it may be most effective to allow them to take the lead role in a child's education. While parents may acknowledge that they provide important contributions to their children's education, their interactions with teachers are often not in the "partnership" model common in North America. Educators planning parent-teacher workshops and parent activities in the classroom have to find ways to work with the status differences and resulting separate roles of teachers and parents.

Educators also have to recognize that educational decisions are often made by the elder or highest status member of the extended family, not necessarily the parents. This has implications for "parent-teacher" programs mentioned above, as participation must be

expanded to include all relevant decision-makers. Educational programs aimed at explaining educational initiatives or reforms may be best directed to high-status community members rather than solely targeting parents. Appropriately recognizing the status of these individuals would be important when making decisions.

Community leaders and national educators and administrators, responsible for the supervision of teachers, have to recognize that the status of teachers can also make it very difficult for parents and other community members to question teachers' behaviours. School governance structures often provide the framework for local community members to supervise and negotiate with teachers. Depending on the relative status of school committee personnel and teachers, this supervision structure may or may not work. Traditional structures that recognize hierarchical status are probably more effective at the local level for supervision purposes than models that impose a foreign, democratic structure on communities.

International agencies also have to work more directly with the high-status decision-makers in the community. Environmental, health, and development programs that attempt to initiate changes that are valuable to the country and the community, must be negotiated with community leaders, rather than relying on children's educational programs to change community practice. Again, working with traditional hierarchies and structures, such as chieftaincies, will be more effective.

Besides recognizing traditional leadership structures, educators at the national and local level must also recognize traditions within the community that support the social organization of the community. These are the traditions that show respect to high-status members of the community and solidify the relationship between school and community.



Finding ways to accommodate and incorporate these traditions into educational activities is important for ensuring positive connections between school and community.

Community leaders also have to become aware of the concerns, such as the expense, regarding some traditions and be proactive in negotiating ways that preserve traditions while supporting education.

As communities enlarge, community members become more mobile, and advanced technologies are in greater use, traditional structures can become unwieldy and impractical. Community leaders, as well as national ministries (Fijian Affairs in this case) have to find ways to respect traditions while accommodating the realities of cultural and socio-economic changes in the community.

### **Questions for Further Research**

This study provides a greater understanding how the factors of relationship, status, and traditions can be used in a traditional, hierarchical community to better communicate and negotiate various interests. In the previous section, I have discussed the implications for local, national, and international educators as well as community members and offered some recommendations regarding how these factors could be integrated into educational planning and implementation. What has been learned also reveals areas requiring further research.

While individuals such as the teachers and the school committee members have traditional relationships with members of the community, the institution of the school is outside of the social structure of relationships in the community of Totoka. Is it possible

that the school can become more a part of the community structure? Can anything be learned from how other institutions such as the church work with the community?

The school committee concept in Fiji, like the school itself, is based on a foreign model. While it has been adopted by the Fijian government, it appears that the Ministry of Education has made few, if any, adaptations to match the Fijian culture. What does a model of governance that incorporates modern and traditional governance and administrative practices look like? This study looked at only one community's school committee. Have other committees incorporated the Fijian traditions, relationships, and status into their structure? How and with what outcomes?

This study shows why educators must make use of relationships, status, and traditions in order to encourage community members to be involved in the education of their children and in school activities. The lack of involvement of men was of particular concern to teachers and members of the community. How were men's interactions with the school influenced more than women's interactions by relationships, status, and traditions? Because of the gender role differences in Fiji, did the gender of the teachers, particularly the Head Teacher, make a difference? How might a different gender balance on the school committee change what influences are important?

Another area to investigate further would be the theory that when the school represents a culture very different from the community culture, the teacher takes on a greater role in student achievement. Boarding schools are common in many developing countries. To what extent are the teachers at boarding schools responsible for educational decision-making for the students? What then is the role of parents and community members in the education of children who attend boarding schools?

While the effectiveness of the programs aimed at changing attitudes of parents towards education could be further evaluated, I believe it would be more useful to study programs that train teachers in working with the community. This approach would take advantage of the position of status that the teachers already have in the community. More research also needs to be done on the effectiveness of health and environment education delivered to the children compared to programs directed towards the teachers and community members.

### **Conclusion**

The connection between school and community is very complex and must respond to the cultures of both the school and the community. When these two cultures are considerably different, the interactions between school and community can be unpredictable and counter-productive. Educational theories are beginning to include the importance of connections between school and community. Nevertheless, in developing countries, the educational decisions made by parents often appear to educators as being uninformed or illogical, because educators have ignored the factors that influence what motivates and inhibits community members in their support of education. Educators have been unable to communicate and negotiate their interests with local communities because their educational theories do not take these factors into account. This research, by closely studying one traditional, hierarchical community in Fiji and its school, has found that in this context relationships, status, and tradition greatly affect the connections and the interactions between school and community.

Educators and community leaders will have better success at communicating and negotiating the various interests if they recognize these factors and understand how they

influence educational decision-making. Educational reforms aimed at the economic development of communities will more likely meet the needs of national leaders as well as community members if educators take into account the influence of relationships, status, and traditions on education and economic decisions at the local level. Similarly, educators and community leaders will be able to use education to balance the maintenance of culture and language with the social changes that traditional communities are facing if they are able to understand the factors that influence the social development of a community.

National ministries of education and international agencies are requiring education systems to be increasingly more effective and efficient. Local communities can be enlisted to help meet these goals if educators understand how relationships, status, and traditions influence the interactions between school and community. Integrating these factors into new models of how the community and the school work together can lead to enhanced student achievement, increased community involvement, and improved accountability at the local level.

Improving the connections between school and community has great potential for improving education systems and increasing the positive effects of education on community development. Understanding the importance of relationships, status, and traditions is vital in improving relations between school and community.

## Appendix I. Questions Presented at Feedback Sessions

### Elders

1. Some people say that the young people lose their traditions when they go away to school. They say the school should teach Fijian culture. Others say it is the parents who should teach the traditions. What do you say?
2. Everyone says they want their children to do well in school and get a paying job. But some children leave school to live in the village, to help their parents. Which is best for the village?
3. The church and the school need support from the villagers. How are things different for the school? What can the school learn from the church?
4. People say that there was more work done at the school in the past. They gave different reasons: (1) they didn't know it was a work day, (2) it is only for *Koro Makawa*, (3) workers wanted to be paid, (4) some people are lazy. Is it worse now than before? What has caused the change?
5. Totoka has changed. These changes are causing problems for the school and the villages. Now that there are three villages there is no communication. There is jealousy and competition. People are going in different directions. I don't see strong leadership pulling everyone together to work on village development. Money is a problem. There is jealousy. People say the money raised is not used correctly. What do you want me to say in the report? What advice do you have for other villages?

## Parents

1. Parents in Totoka are proud to have a school on their island. They want their children to do well at school. Some children miss school. They don't study. Is it the children or the parents who are responsible?
2. Before the exams, the students live with the teachers. There are plans to build a boarding hostel. Then the children go away to the mainland to secondary school. As a parent, are you able to help your children at school?
3. If a child decides to leave school is there anything a parent can do?
4. Everyone says they want their children to do well in school and get a paying job. But some children leave school to live in the village, to help their parents. Which is best for the village?
5. People in the village respect the teachers. I see them listen to the teachers at meetings. Sometimes I hear questions about the teachers. If you had a problem about the school, who would you talk to? Who could help you?
6. People say there was more work done at the school in the past. They gave different reasons: (1) they didn't know it was a work day, (2) it is only for *Koro Makawa*, (3) workers wanted to be paid, (4) some people are lazy. Is it worse now than before?  
What has caused the change?

## Youth

1. Some people say that the young people lose their traditions when they go away to school. They say the school should teach Fijian culture. Others say it is the parents who should teach the traditions. What do you say?
2. Before the exams, the students live with the teachers. There are plans to build a boarding hostel. They the children go away to the mainland to secondary school. Do parents have any influence over how children do at school?
3. Parents tell me that if their child decides to leave school, there is nothing they can do. Is this true? What can parents do?
4. People tell me that the young men don't do enough work in the village or at the school. Do you agree? What do you think is the problem?
5. Everyone says they want their children to do well in school and get a paying job. But some children leave school to live in the village, to help their parents. Which is best for the village?
6. If you are going to live in the village, how much school do you need?
7. Totoka is changing. These changes are causing problems for the school and the villages. One of the problems people talk about is money. They say that money causes jealousy and competition. Is there a problem with money? What advice do you have for other villages?

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