Critically theorising the teaching of literacy and language in Pacific schooling: Just another Western metanarrative?

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Abstract

This article examines the theoretical foundations for the teaching of language and literacy in the Pacific region's primary schools. While there has been an increasing uptake of critical pedagogies and literacies in Pacific Rim countries such as Australia, North and South America and New Zealand this has not been the case within the Pacific region itself. There is a marked resistance from indigenous and Pacific educators, researchers as well as policy makers to ground language and literacy teaching practices within a socially critical tradition. This reluctance is explored in the light of popular Pacific-led policy responses to colonial discourses that seek to re-claim and re-insert Pacific vernaculars into formal school curriculum. The article also explores old, but lingering, colonial discourses of schooling in the region that support the teaching of language and literacy in mainly liberal progressive ways. In the analysis a number of colonial and contemporary language and literacy teaching discourses are identified and offered as reasons for this noticeable critical ambivalence. The article concludes by considering some postcolonial alternatives to both old language and literacy teaching models that tend to erase Pacific cultures, identities, values and sociality and Pacific culturalist alternatives based on socialisation and fear of loss.

Pacific Language Policy and Planning Trends

A major turning point for re-thinking languages in Pacific schooling policy was the 2005 Pacific Forum mandated (Institute of Education/PRIDE[1] sponsored) regional *Language Policies in Education Workshop* held in Fiji. Senior education officials from 15 Pacific countries attended this workshop with the express purpose of re-thinking language and language teaching policy in their own national context (see Mugler & Pene, forthcoming). The main outcome of this meeting was an expressed desire to place greater emphasis on Pacific vernaculars in schooling, thus supporting the longer term vernacular policy and research work of a number of key regional organisations, including the Institute of Education (IOE) at the University of the South Pacific (USP), the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative (RPEI) and the Pacific Forum Ministers meeting - Auckland 2001 (and subsequent annual reviews). Advocacy for vernaculars in formal schooling is not just a Pacific trend but finds resonance globally in a number of United Nations declarations that assert the place of a child's first language in schooling as a fundamental human right. These declarations include: the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (United Nations, 1992), the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), and the recently adopted *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2006).

[1] The Institute of Education (IOE) is an educational consultancy within the School of Education at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. The *Pacific Regional Initiative for the Development of [Basic] Education* (PRIDE) is a large on-going educational aid project carried out under the auspices of the IOE and funded by the New Zealand government and the European Union.

The main lobby group for Pacific vernaculars in schooling is the *Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative*[2] (see Puamau, 2005, p. 5; Taufe'ulungaki, 2003; Thaman, 2003) established in 2000. Members of this group argue that Pacific schooling as it currently stands is largely the little changed product of colonial times. Its key features include an emphasis on English language competence, Western academic knowledges and ways of knowing and Western influenced systems of educational administration. Such a system of schooling is often linked to Pacific cultural and identity loss, language loss and more recently to widespread poor student performance and increasing drop out rates in the region (Puamau, 2002, pp. 67-68; Puamau, 2005). The RPEI calls for the reinstatement of Pacific vernaculars as the medium of learning up to the age of 12. They also support a greater inclusion of Pacific knowledges and ways of knowing in formal schooling and the minimisation of external policy influences in the region's schooling (Taufe'ulungaki, 2002; Teaero, 2002; Thaman, 2002). Old informal learning systems are examined for what they might have to offer contemporary students in Pacific schools (Teaero, 2002).

The 2005 language policy workshop, PRIDE, the RPEIPP and a number of individual Pacific education researchers have influenced to a degree the Forum Education Ministers[3] who have just released a framework for education development by Pacific Island countries through to 2015 (Forum Education Ministers, 2009). The framework is grounded in liberal concepts of human rights, holism, diversity, harmonisation and partnership and linked to UNESCO's *Education For All* and *Millennium Development Goal* statements and strategies (Forum Education Ministers, 2009, pp. 3-5). The framework seeks to address the three main strategic goals of: access and equity in education; quality outcomes; and effective utilisation of resources. Language and literacy teaching's role in achieving these goals is framed in terms of cultural preservation and protection against loss as evidenced in the first of eight "cross cutting themes" - "the cultural values, identities, traditional knowledge and languages of the Pacific people are recognised and protected" (Forum Education Ministers, 2009, p. 17). The significant point to make is that evidence of critical approaches to language and literacy teaching in the achievement of Pacific educational development is at best minimal in these key policy and planning sites.

In contexts beyond the Pacific there are certainly differences in approaches to critical literacies, however, there is general agreement that language is primarily a set of resources utilised by users to achieve desired social and cultural purposes. Accordingly, critical approaches to teaching language and literacy have a special role in facilitating growth in language competency leading children toward full and equitable participation in diverse social contexts. Effective language teaching and learning resists notions of singular, formal, rule governed forms of first and other languages, instead leading children toward competency in multiple forms of first and other language use. Competent language users are able to code switch, that is, they are skilled in reading their ever changing social and cultural context and are able to make appropriate and effective language choices to achieve desired goals as their context changes. Choices are made from the widest possible range of language options, from first and other languages, formal and informal, written and oral, uttered and gestured and from a broad range of special cultural registers to achieve the user's purpose. Furthermore, language users are also able to identify links between the language choices and social purposes of other language users thus creating the conditions for increased equity in social relations, both locally and globally. Increased equity is also achievable when all children move toward competence in the language forms of social

[2] Recently the RPEI has become RPEIPP. The PP stands for "by Pacific people for Pacific people".

[3] "The Pacific Islands Forum, formerly the South Pacific Forum until a name change in October 2000, was founded in August 1971 and comprises 16 independent and self-governing states in the Pacific. The Forum is the region's premier political and economic policy organisation. Forum Leaders meet annually to develop collective responses to regional issues" (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009).

power and status including the language of governance and other socially dominant positions both in their communities and in wider national and global contexts. Key elements of critical literacy found in rim systems of schooling - grounded in poststructural theory that links the teaching of language and literacy directly with the re/distribution of social privilege in society in these ways (see Comber, 2003; Freebody, 1992; Luke, 2000; Street, 1993 among many others) are absent from Pacific language and wider policy research and debate[4].

Language and literacy planning and policy in the Pacific region is instead shaped largely by discourses of culturalism and difference in response to lingering forms of Westernised colonial schooling and curriculum and similar discourses of globalisation that also tend to erase and/or disrupt local Pacific sociality, culture and the vernaculars that are seen as crucial in supporting Pacific difference. Pacific literacies that critique colonisation and resist Westernisation and globalisation are certainly critical, however, it is a critical resistance along simplistic and reductive lines of Western and Pacific difference that employs a mere integration of so-called Indigenous with Western epistemologies. Gegeo and Gegeo-Watson (2002), naming this integration as "critical praxis" (p. 322), argue it will enable children to be prepared for either village or modern post school life chances "whatever the outcome of their schooling may be" (p. 322). There appears in such a claim to be little allowance for self-determination, instead children are swept along by competing discourses of tradition and modernity. Moreover, it is doubtful whether the degree of criticalness in such literacies can address the increasing complexity of contemporary Pacific lives marked by multiple centres and margins, cultural heterogeneity, fluidity and high degrees of social mobility and change.

Resistance to socially critical forms of schooling is perhaps only symptomatic of re-thinking initiatives in wider Pacific society where there is a skepticism of models based on Western democratic ideals. In Fiji, for example, in the 12 months leading up to the military overthrow of the Qarase government in December 2006 moves were underway to overhaul the judicial system and replace it with what was perceived as a more culturally relevant restorative model (Qarase, 2005). The government's rationale for this change was in part that existing judicial processes were based on an irrelevant Western/colonial model[5]. The present military government similarly rejects calls by mainly Australia and New Zealand to return Fiji to a democratically elected government as a panacea for Fiji's complex problems. Not long before this, the pro-democracy movement in Tonga won only small concessions from the Tongan monarchy after a violent protest in 2005. In the tradition of Siteveni Rabuka who led Fiji's first coup in 1987 Western democracy is considered in many parts of the Pacific as a "foreign flower" (Hereniko, 2002, p. 176) - as just another Western metanarrative perhaps. Related are the tensions identifiable in the Pacific region where universal human rights, again based on Western democratic ideals, are seen by some as Eurocentric and foreign, and contradict indigenous rights seen by the same people as Pacific in origin and therefore more culturally appropriate and legitimate[6].

[4] The exception is the current Cook Islands language curriculum framework - *Te Kura Apii o te Reo – Ingiriti* (Cook Islands Government, 2004) which lists a range of language achievement objectives that particularly emphasise the socio-cultural purposes of language for both text users and audiences.

[5] However, in this case the problematic nature of simplistically replacing something perceived as Western, colonial and irrelevant with something perceived as indigenous and authentic was much more apparent than in the educational futures debates. The 2006 coup was justified not just because the restorative model meant 2000 coup perpetrators were to be granted amnesty, but also because of the culturally essentialist assumption that all Fijians, non-indigenous and indigenous, lent their support.

[6] See, for example, Qarase's (2004) suspicion concerning views of the Pacific child and the *Declaration on the Rights of the Child*; and Jalal's (2006) views concerning the role of Pacific women and the *Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women*.

Earlier traces of this resistance[7] are evident in the writings of then emerging Pacific academics such as Ruperake Petaia and Epeli Hau'ofa, in the years after independence through the 1970s. Hau'ofa (1997, 2008), a Pacific anthropologist, observed among the region's academics a widespread dissatisfaction with Marxist theory - its epistemological arrogance and its erasure of Pacific identities and cultural difference - in the newly independent region (p. 44). Petaia much more pointedly criticised Pacific education initiatives based on Western principles of equality and societal transformation (Petaia, 1980). Consider his poem *Kidnapped* included in full below, still on many high schools' required reading lists in the region, that lumps together the socially transformative agenda of Guevara's revolution with capitalism, fascism and communism. Post-independence schooling grounded in any of these Western philosophies is described in terms of kidnap and brainwashing of the Pacific by the West. There is in this poem more than a subtle rejection of Freire's[8] (1972) concept of *conscientizaçâo*, a crucial underpinning of critical pedagogy, which emerged not long before the poem was written:

i was six when
mama was careless
she sent me to school
alone
five days a week
one day i was
kidnapped by a band
of western philosophers
armed with flossy-pictured
textbooks and
registered reputations
'Holder of B.A
and M.A. degrees'

I was held
in a classroom
guarded by Churchill and Garibaldi
pinned-up on one wall
and Hitler and Mao dictating
from the other
Guevara pointed a revolution
at my brains
from his 'Guerilla Warfare'
Each three-month term
they sent threats to my Mama and Papa

Mama and Papa loved

[7] Maori advocate Dominic O'Sullivan (2007, p. 17) takes a much stronger view that liberal-minded middle class European intellectuals' "attraction to a sense of responsibility for the sufferings of the world tends to sentimentalise the exploited and sanctify inequality" - and in the end insidiously undermines Maori efforts for sovereignty in New Zealand.

[8] See critical pedagogue Peter McClaren's (2000) *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire and the pedagogy of revolution*, for an interesting linkage between Freire and Guevara's theoretical foundations.

their son and
paid ransom fees
each time

Each time
Mama and Papa grew
poorer and poorer
and my kidnappers grew
richer and richer
I grew whiter and
whiter

On my release
fifteen years after
I was handed
(among loud applause
from fellow victims)
a piece of paper
to decorate my walls
certifying my release (Petaia, 1980).

The colonial past of Pacific schooling sheds light on this critical ambivalence and suggests that reasons for it go beyond mere recognition of cultural difference and relevance. The following brief historical discourse analysis of Kiribati schooling (Burnett, 2004) identifies a number of dominant educational discourses that reveal the colonial motivations and desires of the British administration in that country. They are, however, similar to those that have shaped the education systems of other Pacific countries under British colonial administration from the late 1800s through to self government in the 1970s.

Discourses of Colonialism - Liberalism and the Culturalist Response

Formal education systems in the Pacific region have changed little since their establishment and growth during the colonial era. They are marked by a heavy emphasis on English language and an academic Western curriculum with the aim of placing students in white collar civil service employment. Despite the structural inequalities with these systems that tend to favour urban over rural, English language competent over vernacular–only competent, and employed over subsistence, there appears to be little desire for change amongst those most closely involved, that is teachers, parents and students. The educational past of Kiribati (Burnett, 2004), outlined very briefly below, is perhaps typical of most of the British controlled Pacific. Identified are discourses of abjectivity, authenticity, contradictory liberalism, development and universalisation. Contemporary language and literacy debates in the wider Pacific region are particularly informed by discourses of authenticity and liberalism.

In the mid to late 1800s when formal schooling was established by missionaries, I-Kiribati were constructed in terms of their abject bodies. This had the effect of negating the intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of their being. This particular discourse shaped colonial governance and schooling largely in terms of hygiene and domesticity, thus in turn facilitating colonial control (Burnett, 2004, pp. 66-69). From the 1920s the formal British presence intervened in colony schooling. Administrators constructed I-Kiribati as cultural beings, 'essentially' different from the European self. This particular set of discourses shaped colonial

governance and schooling in terms of cultural authenticity and preservation, again facilitating colonial control (Burnett, 2004, pp. 69-71). Just prior to the Second World War, Empire-wide discourses of liberalism began to inform colonial governance and schooling in Kiribati. Self governing bodies in colonial governance; increased access to schooling; the creation of a girls' school; the wider dissemination of English as a language of power; and the introduction of secondary selection on merit were all attractive and hence persuasive reforms. However, as with all policy informed by liberal discourses and ideology, societal and educational structures worked to ensure the privileging of some groups and individuals over others (see Burnett, 2004, pp. 71-73). From the early 1960s the emphasis in governance and schooling shifted toward economic development. These discourses of development and human capital implied a Eurocentric set of economic and social goals which were predicated on an uneven distribution of privilege. A dualistic system of schooling was reinforced where a small group of mostly I-Kiribati males were equipped with English language skills and Western academic knowledges and the majority educated in the vernacular according to a set of local knowledges. Finally, after independence, increased access to secondary education occurred. Discourses of universalisation or 'more of the same' have been influential, both a result of a global emphasis on education for all and a desire to meet the demands of I-Kiribati parents for more educational services in Kiribati. Universalisation, however, has the potential to exacerbate existing problems of differential privilege and epistemic violence when it uncritically institutionalises existing unjust practices throughout other sectors of the population (Burnett, 2004, pp. 73-77).

Contemporary whole language approaches to teaching language and literacy have possibly emerged from post-war discourses of contradictory liberalism and universalisation that have informed education more generally. The culturalism underpinning the rejection of critical forms of schooling are remarkably similar to discourses of authenticity that shaped schooling prior to World War Two. Together it is possible to see how contemporary language debates revolve mostly around the English/Pacific vernacular binary, often playing the two off against one another and preventing language policy/teaching parameters from extending to the socio-cultural purposes of language more generally - the starting point for critical literacies.

Most Pacific countries prior to current implementation of vernacular policy changes mentioned earlier adhered to two-step language transition policy that utilised a Pacific vernacular as the language of teaching and as a subject to learn, up to approximately the middle years of elementary school, after which English dominated (Siegel, 1996). However, in practice there has always been a mismatch between official language policy and actual classroom practice, with Pacific vernaculars used widely as a language of teaching well into the later years of secondary schooling. This trend among many teachers who know intimately their teaching contexts only adds to this article’s claim that Pacific linguistic ecologies (Mühlhäusler, 1996) are complex and defy reductive policy decisions that simplistically link language, ethnicity and identity. Official policy interest in alternatives, such as simultaneous bilingual English/Pacific Vernacular language programmes from the early years of schooling onward, has been minimal despite strong arguments for their validity in a number of Pacific countries (see Mangubhai, 2003). Reasons why this might be the case need investigating.

When new literacy initiatives have emerged in the Pacific, they have tended to be bogged down in a methodologism that has limited debates to which language approach works best, for example, “concentrated language”, “book-based”, “thematic”, “integrated” etc (see, for example, Lumelume, n.d.). There is in all these new initiatives a common liberal progressive “meaning maker” (Freebody & Luke, 1990) thread where teachers immerse children in mostly English language and use an ensemble of running records, big books, guided reading and read-to sessions and encourage creativity in written expression using process writing/editing strategies. Trainee teachers at the University of the South Pacific are encouraged to base their practicum

lessons on Brian Cambourne's (1988) whole language liberal progressivism. These language and literacy teaching ideas have arrived in the Pacific region as part of the early post-independence educational development aid programmes funded largely by New Zealand (Elley, Cutting, Mangubhai & Hugo, 1996) and are unashamedly underpinned by wider modernisation aid policy that suggests that if it has worked for developed donor countries, then it must work for the developing world also. Elley et al. (1996), who trialed whole language approaches, such as book flood in the Pacific in the 1980s, based its efficacy for the Pacific on research indicating its success with New Zealand children.

The culturalist response that aims to re-emphasise Pacific vernaculars can also trace its roots to the colonial past. The language past in the region is far more complex than popular, yet simplistic, views of English language imperialism would suggest. The following example, also from Kiribati, helps to illustrate. Before World War Two access to English language skills through formal schooling was severely limited to a small number of male students who were being groomed to help run the colony, with the vast majority schooled in the Kiribati language. The officially stated reasons were related to preservation of culture and identity. Yet, there was also a thinly disguised fear of losing colonial control should the colonised become too familiar with the language of governance – English (Burnett, 2005). In the words of one colonial administrator, I-Kiribati people with English language skills would be "dangerous in as much as it would tend to inspire [them] with ambitions which they could never fulfill and thus become the potential cause of political unrest" (Grimble, 1930, p. 2). In short, a "pragmatic vernacularism" (Pennycook, 1998, p. 84) in Kiribati colonial language policy was used as a technology to maintain imperial domination. It is worth noting here that during this time most officers in the colonial administration and missionaries were fluent in both English and Kiribati vernacular.

After World War Two there was a global shift in British colonial attitudes toward eventual decolonisation and self government. If before the war cultural preservation and colonial fear influenced language policy, then after the war a new found liberalism started to dictate colonial attitudes, education and language policy more specifically. Modernisation and development became part of the colonial agenda and with it came a freeing up of English language across the population through formal schooling. It was part of a broader set of liberal moves fuelled by an attitude of sharing European development with the colonised. As stated earlier, the logic was that if certain social structures, institutions and languages had benefited the coloniser and had brought about a degree of prosperity then it should also work for the colonised. Part of these liberal desires saw English language competence be the aim of schooling for more and more people in the years following the war. By this time, however, English language had already taken hold in the lives of the mostly male elites from before the war. English language competence started to be concentrated within certain families and mostly in urban centres. The pre-war culturalism and post war liberalism inherent in language policy in Kiribati is reflected to a greater or lesser degree in many other Pacific countries. It follows from above that English language in contemporary times has become one of the key criteria for participation in circles of power in many Pacific societies and has also come to be associated with notions of what it means to be educated. It is worth noting here the similarities in desires for vernacular schooling held by early British colonial officials and many contemporary bilingual Pacific elites who also desire a greater policy emphasis on vernaculars in formal schooling.

The stronger the call to vernacularise schooling logically leads to a stronger link made between the vernacular a person uses and what some might imply is an 'authentic' Pacific cultural identity. A small yet vocal minority within Fijian politics, for example, helps to illustrate this point in its suggestion that wherever Fijians are found to be using English too much then their 'real' identity as Fijians must be called into question (see Fijilive, 2004). It is perhaps only a small step here from being considered 'in-authentic' culturally to more serious ethno-nationalist social and

political exclusions - a charge, it might be added, that has at times been directed at sections of Fijian political and social leadership (see Lal & Pretes, 2001). Though a rather extreme example this argument was nevertheless taken up by the mainstream Fijian political leadership in the 2004 - 2006 period as a justification for a greater inclusion of Fijian language in the formal school curriculum. Reductive and essentialised views of culture and identity such as this can be found in the series of readers produced by the Institute of Education for use in the region's primary schools. Apart from New Zealand's *Learning Media* material written for Pacific children in New Zealand which is used in some Pacific countries e.g. Cook Islands, these readers represent a large part of an otherwise very small set of published reading material for use in the region's schools. The *Waka* readers[9], as they are called, have a heavy emphasis on Pacific village life as opposed to urban life and a very high percentage begin with "A long time ago ..." and go on to relate a story from oral tradition. There is a textual strategy here that places Pacific culture and identity in particular spatial and temporal ways, thus denying contemporary Pacific life-ways marked by modernity and change.

Language policy discourses such as these raise questions about the fundamental role of teachers in the region. Is the role of primary teacher one of cultural leadership with aims of cultural preservation and maintenance? Alternatively, is a teacher's role one of promoting linguistic democracy, affirming the language choices of families for their children, which due to complex lived realities may or may not prioritise a Pacific vernacular over English? There would appear to be many people in local Pacific communities that for a variety of reasons use as a vernacular the language of another ethnicity. Policy makers need to recognise the complicated nature of Pacific communities marked by degrees of diaspora, either coerced or voluntary, across multiple geographic or cultural borders, both historically and contemporarily.

Pacific Routes and Roots

The following is by no means an exhaustive list, used here merely to illustrate a major type of Pacific mobility - comprising Indians to Fiji, Banabans to Fiji, Cook Islanders to New Zealand, Tuvaluans to Fiji, I-Kiribati to Solomon Islands and Tuvaluans to Kiribati - examples of the larger collective movements of people around the region (see Crocombe, 2001, pp. 62-71 for a more comprehensive list). These say nothing of the enormous individual mobilities of Pacific people within countries (rural to urban particularly) and within or outside of the region to pursue study, work or personal relationships. In every case there have been degrees of second and third language acquisition and first language loss, confounding simple categories of *first* and *second* language and equally simple correlations between ethnicity, language use and cultural identity.

The postmodern condition of Pacific societies' reductive explanations of colonisation, culture and identity and simplistic binaries of *Pacific* and the *West* are not adequate to theorise Pacific children's experiences of schooling. Instead the complexities and nuances of colonialism, contemporary Pacific social life and schooling - experiences marked less by *rooted-ness*, that is,

[9] Some titles include:

Ioapo, P. (1994). *The boy who never had a coconut*, Suva: Institute of Education.
Kaivao, M. (1997). *The stone boy*, Suva: Institute of Education.
Maegerea, J. (1998). *The snake and the twin brothers*, Suva: Institute of Education.
Ionatana, M. (1989). *Two stories from Tuvalu*, Suva: Institute of Education.
Dageago, P. (1992). *Aiwan, Eidimida and the shark*, Suva: Institute of Education.
Kalles, E. (1998). *The pawpaw boat*, Suva: Institute of Education.
Tangianau, E. (1992). *Why Atiuans live on top of hills*, Suva: Institute of Education.
Teaero, T. (1996). *Tabanaora's shoal*, Suva: Institute of Education.
Belena, P. (1996). *Safe from the sharks*, Suva: Institute of Education.
Tuiolovaa, A. (1995). *Tuiatua*, Suva: Institute of Education.

essentialised Pacific cultural practices, beliefs and values and more by *routed-ness*, that is, cultural fluidity, heterogeneity and mobility (Teaiwa, 1995; Clifford, 1988, 1997) - need to be considered. Much Pacific education policy and practice within the region is grounded in *roots* or as Halualani (2008) terms it "geographic specificity" (p. 9). Key Pacific education research and lobby groups, such as the *Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative* (RPEI), ground their Pacific research and advocacy work in root metaphors, for example, the *Tree of Opportunity* (see Pene, Taufe'ulungaki & Benson, 2002) and to a certain extent *kakala* (Thaman, 2003). It is questionable just how valid such foundations for research and debate are in times marked increasingly by fluidity, border crossing and *routes*. Teaiwa's (1995) *Nei Nim'anoa*, the female voyaging figure from Kiribati oral tradition perhaps better represents what Pacific people are doing with their lives in contemporary times. Borovnik's (2005) study of "emporion" (p. 135) and the "cultural flexibility" (p. 138) of I-Kiribati seamen as they traverse national borders in their work on international ships also demonstrates a somewhat more profound routed-ness that informs the self identity of some I-Kiribati men and more recently some women also. Halualani (2008) even suggests that such migration itself might be a "traditional act of culture" (p. 7) as opposed to a reactive relinquishing of identity for the sake of assimilation, Westernisation and adaptation.

There are a further set of theoretical problems associated with using cultural roots as a starting point for educational and language teaching reform. These problems lie in the often essentialised and reductive views of Pacific culture and identity employed by advocates to re-claim, re-indigenise and to de-colonise Pacific sociality and schooling in particular. First, there is the tendency to construct culture in non-dynamic terms, in so doing denying degrees of change and hybridity in Pacific values, lifeways, materiality, epistemologies, pedagogies, languages etc (see Appadurai, 1998). Second is the assumption of universal consensus within groups, in so doing denying a cultural politics that works to the favour of some individuals and groups within Pacific communities and not others (McConaghy, 2000). Third is the often heard appeal to the past, such as in the *Waka* readers mentioned earlier, and resulting linkages made with cultural authenticity that denies the validity of contemporary Pacific cultural expression (see Fabian, 1983, pp. 33-34). Fourth is a construction of culture in immutable terms that denies the social and historical constructed-ness of Pacific cultural expression and identity (Burnett, 2007). Contemporary Pacific life within the region is increasingly diverse and multiple and can no longer be explained sufficiently using older anthropological, monolithic, static concepts of culture and identity (see Hau'ofa, 2008). There is a need perhaps to search for route metaphors to guide re-thinking and research into the experiences of Pacific children in the region's schools and the rethinking of language and literacy policy in particular.

Critical Critiques and Possibilities

The limitations of critical approaches to education have been well documented from within the European centres that have generated them. These limitations also apply within the Pacific region. There is in critical pedagogies and literacies a danger of defining a role for those charged with critical curriculum decision making that has the potential to reinforce rather than destabilise colonial oppressions and a hierarchical binary of enlightened/unenlightened self/other. It is a role described by McConaghy (2000) that is adopted by "an intellectual class or class of interlocutors who are simultaneously able to speak on behalf of the oppressed and conscientise them" (pp. 238-239). Associated with this role there can be, as Jennifer Gore (1992) argues, a high level of "arrogance" based on a rationale of "what we can do for you!" (pp. 61-62). This role is based on a belief that the subaltern cannot speak for themselves or have a true awareness of their subjugated position. These beliefs also come very close at this point to suggesting that the majority of Pacific people have been duped by the discursive activity of socially dominant groups over time and who need the veil of false consciousness lifted from their eyes, or in the words of

emancipatory discourse, must undergo a decolonisation of the mind[10]. These criticisms are certainly valid and need to be allowed to temper the debates concerning language and literacy teaching in the Pacific. There has also been some criticism of critical pedagogy from feminist perspectives beyond its tendency to privilege the role of the teacher as 'heroic pedagogue' thus possibly reinforcing rather than destabilising oppressive relationships (Gore, 1992). Other criticisms include its inherent patriarchal nature (Luke, 1992) and, echoing Hau'ofa and Petaia mentioned earlier, its basis in Eurocentric enlightenment rationality (Ellsworth, 1989, 1997) that potentially locks critical pedagogy into a binary with an irrational non-European other. In these criticisms there is much to heed.

These critiques, however, are not sufficient to warrant bypassing an overall critical direction for Pacific schooling altogether. There is still much that is valid in the encouraging of a critical awareness in Pacific learners, in terms of transformation, empowerment and justice. Ellsworth (1989) argues that critical awareness needs to be something constantly striven for despite the difficulties. It is achievable directly in proportion to the level those involved - those with liberal Western influences as well as those Pacific elites with culturalist agendas of difference - recognise what Ellsworth (1989) describes as their own "interestedness and partiality" (p. 322). Furthermore, theorising critical pedagogy has changed from within, attributable largely to critiques of critical pedagogy by black, feminist, queer and other minority group theorists. In recent times, it has aligned more closely with postcolonial and poststructural applications to oppressions and social justice (see, for example, Hickling-Hudson, 1998) that are alert to individual agency and the disruption of oppressive discourses across multiple axes. Educational and language teaching futures generally in the Pacific can still be imagined loosely around the notion of critical pedagogy and literacies - albeit with a difference. Pacific educators only lead the gaze back, leaving futures in the hands of those historically on the subjugating end of colonial discourse. These educators, familiar with the constitutive work of discourse, acting with the highest levels of reflexivity, facilitate future talk by directing students' gaze to the past. Actual reforms, changes or interventions become the task of the local people. Strategic solidarity may be mobilised from within to facilitate change. Such futures talk needs to be, following Ellsworth (1997), "response-able" (p. 127). By this it is not just intended that a degree of care needs to be taken for self and other, but rather the talk needs to be far more dialogic, evoking a response.

Postcolonial perspectives on critical approaches to language and literacy teaching do not seek to simply "recover an alternative set of cultural origins not contaminated by the colonising experience" (Hickling-Hudson, 1998, p. 328) such as in this case Pacific vernaculars. Instead there is a recognition that the "transculturation of the colonising experience was irreversible for all" (Hickling-Hudson, 1998, p. 328). A postcolonial approach, as Hickling-Hudson (1998) suggests, would allow for the "interconnectedness and discontinuities that colonisation set in play" (p. 328). Current liberal approaches to teaching refuse to accept that the colonial pasts of Pacific peoples have anything to do with the teaching of language and literacy. On the other hand the culturalist response that seeks to reclaim and re-indigenise is simplistically anti-colonial, thus refusing to accept the increasing complexity and agency of Pacific people's lives. As Paul Meredith (1999) has noted in response to the culturalist discourse of some Maori advocates in New Zealand - "they [the West] are here to stay and some of us are them" (p. 14). This is a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994; Richardson, 2006) perspective that recognises that culture

[10] Advocates of the culturalist model of reclaiming and re-indegenising actually make such assertions when attempting to reconcile many Pacific people's desires for so called Western knowledges and forms of schooling, including English language competence for their children. See, for example, "Pacific people [as] passive vessels" (Herrmann, 2007, p. 41), in need of a decolonisation of the mind (Puamau, 2005), in 'identity denial' (Sanga, 2002), in need of 're-education' and 'repatriation' (Fasi, 2002, p. 34).

and identity - and what it means to be a competent language user and literate person - is in a constant state of hybridity and change.

Therefore, one possible direction is an approach to the teaching of language and literacy in the Pacific region that exposes children to sensitive and critical readings of the colonial and educational past of *each of the languages* of their particular Pacific community, that is English *as well as* any number of Pacific vernaculars. The critical focus of literacy and language needs to broaden the present focus on an homogenised and reductive West, and in particular English language among other colonial artifacts such as those mentioned at the beginning of this article - governance, judiciary and rights among others. The critical focus needs to also include what is framed by the common culturalist response as Indigenous. It is a critical approach that asks what are the particular histories of each language that is spoken in particular Pacific communities and what have been the socio-cultural purposes of these languages - that is their relations to power. Children are allowed to see the links between particular languages and life chances, using the past and how discourses of schooling have contributed to the present. At the very least it might well be included as a postcolonial supplement to the current two stage approach to language and literacy teaching or to bilingual approaches.

Martin Nakata (1993, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2001), in the Indigenous Australian context, uses this rationale for the teaching of English to Indigenous Australian children. The teaching of English is certainly not justified in terms of its modernising and civilising utility, but neither is it justified in terms of access and the achievement of liberal democratic level playing fields because English is considered a language of power. Rather, English language competence is desired because it is a potential window for Indigenous Australians into the means by which they have been and still are being framed by socially dominant European Australia. This stands in opposition to the all too common culturalist charge mentioned earlier that where desires seem to be greater for English rather than Vernacular competence in schooling Pacific minds need to be decolonised. Nakata's rationale can also be applied to Indigenous Vernaculars, which, as mentioned earlier, are also politicised and thus marshaled by elites to frame and subjugate in the same way English can. Language and literacy practices, anchored in the specific linguistic ecology of individual Pacific national and sub-regional contexts, taught in such a way are *critical* in a cultural and historical sense. As a result Pacific language learners become more alert to this language/power nexus and become more self determining users of language, either English or a Pacific vernacular. Willinsky (1998) describes this as "a student's right to know" (p. 252).

Further research and debate is needed as to what form such a postcolonial supplement (Willinsky, 1994, 2006) might take in the region's schools and ways in which more open and collaborative discussions can take place around its implementation. Further research also needs to explore how critical approaches might be incorporated into Pacific school curriculum in order to provide a language for wider epistemological and pedagogical critiques. Perhaps such an implementation might be better outside of mainstream social and educational structures. However, the idea of a supplement does at least provide a useful starting point for debates about more equitable language practices in the region. Rather than reinforcing the unfortunate either/or binary of English and Pacific vernaculars it is better, as Willinsky suggests to:

> Go *informed* and *tentative*, *receptive* and *disruptive*, into the *play of language and languages* that speak the world. Let us support people's choices of language. Let us advocate that lessons on language of greater global currency *include the historical forces* that have created the unequal exchange value of this global linguistic economy (Willinsky, 1998, p. 205 [emphasis added]).

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