THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS ART, CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE ART EDUCATION CURRICULA AT THE PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL

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WORKING DOCUMENT
INTRODUCTION

... Pacific societies had functional, meaningful and relevant education systems before the introduction of schools.

(Konai Helu Thaman, 2002:4)

The arts ... can be a part of a universal core of knowledge and skills that can be instrumental in assisting society achieve particular individual, social and technological goals, or it can become central to the pursuit of knowledge, understanding and appreciation of a society's cultural forms and expressions.

(F.J. Saemala, cited in Solomon Islands 1990:1)

The history of humankind clearly demonstrates that a common and fundamental preoccupation of all civilizations is the preparation of the young generations to become useful, active and responsible adult members. This process has always been done through education, a process through which the young members are socialized into the more important and unique aspects of those cultures – worldviews, values, role expectations and their arts.

Culture is a vital component of a people's very humanity and identity. The arts, in turn, have been and will continue to be an immensely significant and invaluable component of the cultural capital of Oceania. As an important part of culture, art has always been traditionally conceived, produced, used, distributed, and critiqued by islanders from their ethnocentric perspectives. Over the centuries, however, alternative perspectives – especially from a Eurocentric viewpoint - were introduced, used and perpetuated through the school system. As the cash economy assumed greater centrality in the lives of Pacific Islanders, the arts were gradually sidelined into the peripheries of formal educational provision.

This study focuses on, firstly, the nature of indigenous art, culture and knowledge in the small island states of Oceania and, secondly, how these could be meaningfully integrated into the art education curricula at the primary school level in the formal education system.

The paper is divided into five sections:

1. Culture in Oceania.
2. Art in Oceania.
3. Indigenous education and knowledge in Oceania.
4. Art education in Oceania.
5. The roles of indigenous culture and knowledge in the art education curricula at the primary school level in Oceania.
The gist of the arguments canvassed in this paper is that the small island states of Oceania have rich, diverse and very unique indigenous cultures, artistic heritage and educational thoughts and practices. These have survived and continue to play significant roles in the live of people in the region today, despite the fact that the formal education system has been dominating educational thoughts and practice in the islands since contact with the outside world.

The paper does not prescribe solutions for all countries of the Pacific. That responsibility rests squarely with individual countries. Instead, the paper provides the framework with which such an undertaking could be performed by these countries on an individual basis.

**CULTURE IN OCEANIA**

Providing detailed comprehensive descriptions of cultures in the region is inherently an impossible Herculean undertaking that is beyond the scope of this paper. The sheer vastness of the area preempts any attempt to over the area in a relatively brief paper such as this. The region represents a phenomenally diverse variety of cultures, as echoed by Thaman (2002:4):

…we all know that our region is a culturally rich and diverse area where unique cultures have existed for millennia. Most of these cultures have stores of knowledge and understandings, beliefs and values developed over thousands of years and passed on from generation to generation in languages that were appropriate for living in society and meaningful to learners. These cultures have adapted to the many changes in the past, but the main aim of learning has remained unchanged – cultural survival and continuity.

The paper, therefore, provides commentaries about commonalities that underpin discussions about education, culture and art education in the region.

The corpus of literature on the cultures of the Pacific can be categorized into two major divisions. The early literature was written by expatriate scholars, missionaries, colonialists and traders who inevitably utilized exogenous theoretical and empirical frameworks for description and analysis of the cultures and arts of this region, often from a Eurocentric perspective, viewing the cultures and arts of the region as objects of anthropological curiosity. Such interpretations almost always ended in distortions and misunderstandings to various degrees of the cultures under study as a direct consequence of the subjugation of such cultural phenomena to pre-existing norms, values and expectations. This eventuality occurred principally because scholars used elements from their own socio-cultural backgrounds as the yardsticks with which they perceived and evaluated other cultures, including those of the Pacific.

The second wave of literature on the subject consists of writing by indigenous Pacific Islanders (see for example Thaman, Hau’ofa, Wendt and Hereniko) or people who have studied and lived extensively in the region. There is now a considerable corpus of literature on the cultures of the Pacific Islands.

The definitions of the term *culture* by Swartz and Jordan (1980) and Thaman (1999) are useful for the purposes of this study. Swartz and Jordan (1980:52) write that
The culture of a group is the sum of the morally forceful understandings acquired through learning and shared by the members of that group.

Konai Thaman’s (1999a:2) stipulative definition of culture as “a way of life of group of people” is the one that is used for the purposes of this study. Thaman has emphasized elsewhere the critical importance of and the need to study culture, arguing that an understanding of a people’s culture is central to understanding human beings. Thaman stresses the fact that each cultural group has a unique system of perceiving, understanding and organizing the world around them. As such, it is important to see parts of a culture as conceptualised by members of the group being studied. Underlying Thaman’s viewpoint are the concepts of contextualization and cultural relativism. The former holds that the context is essential for the accuracy of the interpretation of phenomena. The nature and effects of the cultural context are omnipresent but differ depending on time, space, event and people involved. It is therefore critically important to view the wide array of diversity in the cultures of Oceania today in their phenomenological contexts and, equally as important, attempt to see and understand them from the viewpoints of the people whose culture is under consideration.

The theory of cultural relativism stresses the point that one culture is as good as another. The concept posits that the behaviour and worldviews of a group of people can be best understood only according to the culture of that group. Implied in this is the caution to refrain from making assessments about one culture based on viewpoints that are grounded in another culture.

Seen in the light of the definitions by Swartz and Jordan (1980) and Konai Thaman (1999a), culture can be regarded as a set of shared prescriptive understandings because it provides specific guidance for expected behaviour, values and worldviews of a particular group of people at a given period of time.

Culture is a dynamic phenomenon that evolves over time to respond to emerging needs and circumstances. This evolutionary nature of culture is a direct consequence of learning about and responding to these needs and circumstances. These prescriptive understandings themselves are constantly evolving over time. Danielsson has correctly noted the dynamic nature of culture and pointed out the unrealistic nature of wholesale repetition of ancient culture. Danielsson (1980:16) argues that culture

... is never a set of fixed and uniform behaviour, and any attempt on a large scale to turn back the clock is bound to end in dismal failure. The eternal question that the (Pacific) islanders will have to face also in the future is therefore, what to retain of the traditional culture and what to adopt in the form of new ideas and things.

The literature on culture in the region has used the term culture in two main ways, as pointed out by Ron Crocombe (1980). Crocombe writes that the term is used in the narrow sense focusing on (i) creative expressions such as language, song, dance and art, and (ii) and the broader anthropological perspective in which culture is regarded as a total way of life. This study acknowledges the importance and validity of the two perspectives of the term culture. Furthermore, the study embraces Vilsoni Tausie’s views regarding the creative aspects of culture. Tausie (1980:6), in his study of art in the
Pacific up to the late 1970s, points out two reasons for the importance of the creative aspects of culture in the region:

Firstly, culture gives one confidence and identity. A person without a culture is a person without a soul. Culture is something that belongs to a particular cultural group – it is something its members can call their own. Even if other people can imitate it, what they produce will usually be ‘second rate’. Culture is a means by which a particular group can assert itself and develop confidence. Secondly, cultural expression allows for greater fulfillment of the potential of everyone.

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that the Pacific Islands are very diverse culturally. Some countries (such as Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands) are multi-cultural, sometimes consisting of more than two major cultures. Fiji, for example, boasts of Fijian, Hindi, Muslim, Hindu, Rotuman, Banaban, Tongan, Samoan and other Pacific Island cultures and a multitude of subdivisions and variations of these. Others (such as Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Marshall Islands) are largely culturally homogenous with slight variations between islands.

ART IN OCEANIA

Culture has numerous constituent elements. The arts are one of the key elements of a culture or, as one writer puts it, a part of a people’s “cultural capital”. Oceanic arts consist of many forms: tattooing, scarification, carving, tapa-making and printing, dance, poetry, oratory, singing, canoe-building, architecture and others. All these art forms are closely related to each other and, moreover, they are closely associated with life in general in traditional societies in the region. Teasdale and Teasdale (1992a:5) recognized the importance of this concept when they were considering the establishment of a Pacific arts and culture program at USP. They write that:

The arts in traditional Pacific societies are not compartmentalised, nor are they practiced in isolation from everyday life. Indeed, they are part of the very fabric of people’s existence, expressing values and beliefs, and ensuring the stability of social relationships. Pacific arts therefore need to be studied within the context of the total way of life of the peoples in the region.

As such, the arts are one of the key defining characteristics of a culture.

This paper focuses on traditional and contemporary art in Oceania. Three decades ago, Dodd highlighted the central role of art in the whole sphere of human experience. Dodd (1969:31) pointed out that

A man’s [sic.] art is the essential expression of himself and his society, his record for the world to see; his communication down through the ages of his innermost feelings, his joys, his sorrows, his passions, his wonders, of all the most refined and treasured-up tangible things that set him apart from his fellow beasts and make him a man.
The Pacific Islands has always been a goldmine of excellent artistic heritage (Mead, 1984; Meyer, 1995; Bonnemaison, et. al. 1996; Cartmail, 1997; White, 1999) and one that continues to evolve in response to emerging needs and the ready availability of alternative ideas, tools and materials (Neich, 1984; Thomas, 1995). Moreover, there has been a renaissance of uniquely Pacific art that is very likely to re-place Oceanic art on the stage of the world of art in the future (Thomas, 1995; Hau’ofa, 1998). Traditional Pacific art has impacted positively on art in the First World, especially with regard to the work of eminent artists like Pablo Picasso and Paul Gauguin. Today, artists of Pacific Island ethnic origin like Fatuu Fe’eu, Michel Tuffrey and John Pule are creating artistic tsunamis in countries like New Zealand and using art to serve their broader interests. This is expressed succinctly by Nicholas Thomas (1995:204) who writes that these artists use art

... to negotiate relations between old and new homes, to celebrate tradition and to create new forms of Polynesian culture that are meaningful for young second-generation migrants as well as those brought up in the islands.

**Periods in the history of Oceanic arts**

In this section, we shall attempt to identify and describe the characteristics that differentiate the various periods of Oceanic art from a historical perspective. It is important to note that all individual countries have their own unique forms of art. This preliminary categorisation of developments in Oceanic art into periods is based on changes that occurred as a result of interaction with external forces. For this reason, the periods canvassed here run parallel to those of history in Oceania. It is necessary to view these periods individually in order to understand more fully the traditions and transitions in Oceanic art and the underlying forces that precipitated these developments.

There appear to be four distinct periods in the history of Oceanic art. Each of these periods has its own distinctive characteristics. These are the pre-contact period (pre-history - 1500s), contact period (1550s - 1960s), post-independence period (1960s - 1980) and the neo-traditional period (1980s - ).

**Pre-contact period**

Oceanic art in the pre-contact period was characterised by several important features: exclusive dependence on the natural environment for media, generally coarse and simple decorative features, conformity and conservatism to established modes of working, uniqueness among individual artwork, special mana for artists, prominent functional considerations of artwork, specialist artists and a sexist basis for allocation of responsibilities for art making.

During the pre-contact period, artists and craftspeople depended exclusively on what was available from their natural environment for their raw materials and, in many cases, their inspiration as well. Thus artists in islands with big trees suitable for carving were able to develop rich carving traditions and built canoes using the dugout method, like the druа (canoe) of Fiji and the lepuke (canoe) of the Solomon Islands. On the other hand, carving was virtually non-existent on the small coral atolls which could not support trees
appropriate for carving. Craftspeople on coral atolls developed ingenious ways of building canoes by lashing together thin planks of wood with string, such as the wa (small canoe) and baurua (ocean-going canoe) of Kiribati. While there was no carving tradition on such islands, the people were able to compensate for this absence by developing other art forms such as dancing and weaving that made extensive use of material available from their particular environment. This dependence on the local environment was also manifested in the kind of colours used during this period: black, brown and white. These colours were made from wood, brown earth and soot from the burning of certain fruits such as candlenuts. Because these objects were made from natural objects and exposed to the humid atmospheric conditions of the islands, their lifespan were relatively short (except where they had been collected, preserved and displayed in museums overseas).

The decorative aspects of work from the pre-contact period that involved cutting, painting and printing were, in most cases, relatively coarse and simple. This feature can be attributed to the kind of tools used by the artists. Tools used for carving during this period were made from stone, shell and bones. These, needless to point out, were relatively difficult to work with. They got blunt very quickly and were, in most cases, incapable of being used to execute fine detail. Colours for masi printing, tattooing and painting of objects were limited to the earthy ones of brown, black and white. However, it must be pointed out that despite this simplicity in carving, some designs used in other art forms were quite elaborate - like the patterns in tattoos in Polynesia and Micronesia, scarifications in Melanesia and masi patterns in Fiji.

A cursory examination of artwork from this period shows that each piece was unique. This was attributable to the fact that artists and craftspeople tended to work on one piece at a time. There was no means of mass-producing items. It is evident from available samples of artwork from that period that similar motifs and other peculiar features from certain areas were used on most artwork from those areas. The individuality and uniqueness of each artwork were manifested in the different ways these features and motifs were used and composed on the artwork itself. They also differed according to the size and shape of the surfaces being used and the purposes at hand.

Functionality was a predominant consideration and priority in much of the artwork from the pre-contact period. The arts and crafts were closely interwoven with and inseparable from the daily struggles for living. Contrary to much of the over-romanticised images of Oceania peoples as the "exotic other" and "noble savage" living an easy and free life in paradisiacal conditions on earth, life was often difficult on the islands. There were frequent wars. The natural environment was not always hospitable. It was sometimes extremely difficult to obtain the basic necessities. Objects were produced for utilitarian purposes, hence, in most cases, the overriding significance of functionality over aesthetic considerations. Nothing was produced exclusively as an object for aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment. On certain occasions, objects were produced for ceremonial purposes and then destroyed immediately afterwards. On other occasions, some artwork such as garlands and fine mats were produced only to be given away later.

Art and artists thrived reasonably well in traditional Oceanic societies. Artists normally came from specialist clans and had a lot of mana. They were regarded as important members of society. They were providing masks and carving sacred figures through which the gods, spirits and ancestors entered this world. They also built canoes through
which the islanders obtained a significant part of their livelihood and through which the
great Oceanic traditions of seafaring and navigation were perpetuated and perfected.
They tattooed certain members of society to enhance their physical beauty or to
contribute to their fierce looks during war. They made weapons that were used for
ceremonial purposes and for defending villages, and built houses for shelter in all kinds
of weather. In return for these important contributions to society, the artists and
craftspeople were looked after by members of society benefiting from their talents, their
services were reciprocated in kind, given the respect they deserved and excluded from
other commitments to enable them to concentrate on their arts and crafts.

Art in this period underwent comparatively little changes. This slow “development” in the
arts, in kind and in degree, can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the artists and
craftspeople continued to use the same raw materials that their ancestors had used.
Secondly, the purposes of the arts and crafts remained virtually unchanged over the pre-
contact period. Thirdly, there was no significant influx of new ideas coming into the
islands from beyond. However, it must be pointed out that while there had been no
contact with the outside world at this stage, there was always a free flow of inter-island
travel crisscrossing the biggest ocean in the world. This culminated in the intra-Oceanic
cross-fertilisation and extensive borrowing of ideas, art forms and language. This is
evident from oral traditions, artwork, language and archaeological discoveries.
Examples of this are tattooing and the Lapita pottery. Fourthly – and most importantly in
my opinion - the indigenous forms of education in Oceania emphasised and perpetuated
conformity and continuity not only in the arts but in other spheres of culture as well. The
conservative and conformative nature of indigenous education and culture in general
contributed greatly towards the discouragement of significant departures from the
accepted cultural norms of the day. All these have contributed to the relatively slow
pace of dynamism and changes in the arts and crafts of Oceania for many centuries.

Traditions in Oceania made clear demarcations between the roles of men and women in
the making of art. This gender-based separation also carries on into the viewing of
artwork in the production process. Once a piece is finished, the gender-based
boundaries that restricted access during the production process could be crossed.

Contact period

A timeframe for this period is tentatively suggested as starting from the 1550s and
ending in 1960. There had been some arrivals of foreign ships before this time but they
were too infrequent to have any significant impact and influence on life in the islands.
The arrival of Alvaro de Mendana in the Solomon Islands from 1567-1568 appears to be
the most logical starting point for this period. This was followed by others, notably de
Bougainville and James Cook.

Contact here refers to four major groups of Western people: sailors, traders,
missionaries and colonial administrators. Each of these groups brought with it a different
set of ideologies, purposes and influences. The missionaries and colonialists exerted
the most lasting influences. Collectively, they introduced not only new ideas but also
new, more efficient tools, materials and equipment that significantly influenced art and
crafts in the islands. These included inter alia commercially produced paint, iron cutting
tools (axes, chisels, adzes, knives), brushes and painting surfaces such as canvas and
board. The introduction of these novel ideas, equipment and materials gave the
Oceanic artist greater flexibility and a wider scope of inspiration. This point can be
illustrated using the example of carving. The sharper and more refined chisels meant that the carver was now able to (a) work at a faster pace and (b) execute finer, extensively elaborate and decorative patterns, including very delicate ones that would have been impossible to execute using the traditional tools of yesteryear.

The intentions of the different groups were markedly different. The missionaries' fundamental objective was the Christianisation of the "heathen natives". To this end, they established schools in which they taught basic numeracy and literacy. These basic skills were necessary in order to enable the natives to learn to read the bible. This, in turn, would expedite the Christianisation process. An integral component of this endeavour was the elimination of aspects of culture and art which the missionaries perceived to be inconsistent with their Christian beliefs and practices. Many of the artwork were regarded by these zealous missionaries as idolatrous representations of a pagan and heathen culture. These were therefore de-aestheticised and subsequently subjected to ruthless elimination or deportation to the missionaries' land of origin. The gravest sin committed by the missionaries was their miserable failure to realise that an elimination of one aspect of culture or art automatically culminated in the triggering of a domino effect on other aspects of culture and art. For example, condemning and stopping one form of dance automatically led to the elimination of all the poetry, crafts and singing that were originally and intrinsically associated with that particular form of dance.

Colonial administrators were more interested in bringing about a new political order modeled on their own countries. Their fundamental objective was to introduce and re-enforce the culture, political systems and values of the colonial powers. This was achieved through a carefully designed curriculum which, in many respects, culminated in the colonisation of the mind. To this end, schools were made to teach in a wholesale manner everything about the colonial powers: geography, history, literature, art and others. Curriculum was directly transplanted from the colonial countries. Generations of islanders grew up learning more about the colonialists' home countries than about their very own. This approach typified the colonial education systems in Oceania at this time. Oceanic cultures adopted many features of Western culture. It resulted in acculturation of the natives and a gradual demise of much of Oceanic culture and art. Goldsmith (1993:285) described in very powerful terms the colonialists' aims and legacies when he concluded that the:

... colonial powers sought to destroy the cultural patterns of traditional societies largely because many of their essential features prevented traditional people from subordinating social, ecological and spiritual imperatives to the short-term economic ends served by participation in the colonial economy. There is no better way of destroying a society than by undermining its educational system.

All the indigenous cultures of Oceania have, consequently, been overlaid to considerable extents by the major Western cultures. But Ron Crocombe, a scholar specialising in Pacific Studies, emphasised that no island culture has been destroyed in totality. Crocombe (1980:64) noted that

In no case has the indigenous culture been totally destroyed. No substantial group of Pacific Islanders has completely given up their own cultural tradition in order to live exclusively by an introduced cultural
tradition (though some individuals have). In all cases, there has been adaptation, adjustment, compromise, protective reaction. The nature and extent of these adaptations has varied enormously.

Epeli Hau'ofa argues that the colonialists were also responsible for introducing a sense of inferiority among the islanders, a feeling that existed for many decades and culminated in a sense of helplessness of islanders. Hau'ofa (1993a:3) writes that

As far as concerns Oceania, derogatory and belittling views of indigenous cultures are traceable to the early years of interactions with Europeans. The wholesale condemnation by Christian missionaries of Oceanic culture as savage, lascivious and barbaric has had a lasting effect on people's views of their histories and traditions.

Another writer from Oceania (Tausie, 1980) has pointed out that the missionaries and colonialists were undermining the work of artists as specialists who encapsulated the shared belief systems and values of Oceanic societies in art form. The results of contact with the outside world was not all positive, as noted by Danielsson (1980:13):

In the Pacific islands, as in so many other parts of the world, the European and American discovery and penetration has resulted in appalling destruction, suppression and neglect of the indigenous cultures. Even when the newcomers had the noblest motives, as in the case of the missionaries, the changes they brought were rarely beneficial to the islanders, if the total situation is taken into consideration.

Contact with the Western world altered the perceptions of what constituted art. The original understanding of the term art seems to differ from the indigenous perspective and what has come to be fully accepted today. Many of the objects that have come to be labeled as "art" today were never seen as such by the indigenous peoples of Oceania – the original creators and users of these objects. Western art collectors removed these functional objects from their contexts, re-presented them out of context in museum showcases and labeled them "art". There is, in fact, no distinctive generic word that could be satisfactorily translated as art in most of the languages of Oceania. However, there are specific indigenous terms to describe the various art forms such as tattooing and tapa printing.

The bottom line is that the status quo had been irreversibly disturbed. The people responsible for the Westernisation and Christianisation of Oceania have been well meaning in their intentions and blinded by their ethnocentric objectives. Empirical evidence provides ample testimony to their extensive "successes" in these areas. There was a general craving for and glorification of anything "foreign". Contact with various groups from the West has resulted in many changes: (a) elimination of significant components of indigenous art forms, (b) extensive modification of certain art forms, (c) introduction and integration of new ideas, motifs and materials, (d) faster pace with which artists and craftspeople were able to work, (e) an instilling of a sense of inferiority and helplessness among islanders and (f) a new view of indigenous objects as "art".
Post-independence period

The decolonisation period began in 1962 with the independence of what was then Western Samoa from New Zealand. The third era of art in Oceania is commenced in 1962 and ended in 1980. Nationalistic feelings were running high at this time. There was a determined and sustained effort to search for and re-establish national identities, many of which were in grave danger of undergoing further dilutions. Oceanic art in this period was, in the words of Nicholas Thomas (1995:184), used to "express the cultural vitality of a 'new nation'". These efforts led to changes in educational policies of the newly independent or self-governing states. The dominant war-cry of policy-makers in the 1960s and 1970s in the region was "relevance" in educational programmes. The search for relevance in educational programmes in Oceania occurred in earnest in the 1970s with an emphasis on self-reliance and a re-assertion of national identities. It took the form of curriculum development for schools and the establishment of alternative types of schools. However, as pointed out by Thomas and Postlethwaite (1984), there was no certainty about the precise direction countries in the region wanted their schools to take regarding cultural development. The same can be said about art.

In an effort to provide adequate numbers of skilled human resources for an expanding public service, the newly independent nations concentrated their education efforts on school subjects which were perceived to be appropriate for this purpose. Emphasis was placed on subjects that were believed to be more useful for securing jobs for students later on. Bright students were taught the so-called "academic" subjects like English, Mathematics, Accounting, History, Geography and Science. Those who were academically-challenged were taught other, so-called "soft" and "non-academic" subjects like woodwork, technical drawing, home economics, art and music. Thus art was pigeon-holed in the outer periphery of the whole curriculum despite the rhetoric advocating relevance and cultural and artistic revival.

The achievement of political independence brought new responsibilities to the new states. One of these responsibilities was the balancing of national budgets. This represented formidable challenges. In countries which are comparatively poorly endowed with natural resources, tourism has emerged as the major source of revenue. An important money earner within the tourism industry is the sale of art and crafts. Thus, the tourist emerged as a significant part of the equation - the new and valuable visitor to Oceanic shores. Of interest to us for the purposes of this paper is the effect of the tourist factor on Oceanic art. The actual impact of the tourist factor on Oceanic art is contested ground. On the one hand, the influence of the tourist factor is considered negative and detrimental to the purity of Oceanic art. This may be useful economically but has been condemned as aesthetically inferior and fake by notable scholars from Oceania such as Albert Wendt (1983) and Vilisoni Tausie (1980). The relatively rich influx of tourists resulted in a huge demand for Oceanic "art". Local "artists" were therefore forced by economic necessity to respond to and satisfy this surging demand by mass-producing "traditional" artifacts. There were bland attempts to approximate features that conformed to tourists' expectations of Oceanic "primitive art" such as outsized penises. On the other hand, some writers argue that the tourist factor has in fact contributed to the very survival of Oceanic art and contributed to the livelihood of these artists. The concerns raised by Tausie and Wendt are still valid today.

This non-transient search for cultural identity following independence was characterised by excessive rhetoric (which was used by politicians to evoke intense feelings of cultural
pride), relative inactivity in the areas of serious art education, lack of focus and co-ordination, and commercialisation of inferior artwork. It did very little to develop quality local art and perpetuated the worship of exogenous art forms.

**Oceanic art in transition: the neo-traditional period**

Art in the region today is on the threshold of a new and exciting era for the region is currently experiencing a dynamic renaissance of Oceanic art on an unprecedented scale. This renaissance is, in many respects, a form of emboldenment and empowerment for the people of Oceania.

For a long time since the contact era, Oceanic artists have been blindly "feasting" on Western art forms. They had been caught in an artistic void – Oceanic islanders forsaking their heritage and blindly mimicking outsiders' traditions. In a report to the USP Council, Hau'ofa (OCAC, 1998:1) correctly noted that

> The arts of our ancestors have long been acclaimed internationally; but since most of them are stored and exhibited in museums, galleries and private collections in Europe and North America, their impact on artistic developments of non-Oceanic arts has been far greater than on ours. Instead of developing our own contemporary arts, we have largely adopted those of the West, or more unfortunately, copied and endlessly reproduced our ancestral models for commercial purposes.

Hau'ofa is pointing to the two equally unacceptable extremes – the blind copying of either Western art or Oceanic art from a bygone era. Inherent in such a statement is the need to develop something new that is anchored in Oceanic heritage and yet simultaneously possesses adequate vitality to express the concerns of today and to make maximum use of contemporary art materials.

Artists working at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture have been striving – and largely succeeding in creating new art that are based on the arts of past in this region. Other artists are working elsewhere (Toafa in Samoa, Aloi Pilioko in Vanuatu, etc) and collectively re-defining art in Oceania today.

**INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE PACIFIC**

In this paper, Thaman's (1999) definition of the term *education* as an "introduction to worthwhile learning" is used. This definition is useful because it provides an apt description of education both in the formal sense and the indigenous sense too.

Education in the region, in the broader and proper sense of the word, pre-dated the arrival of both missionaries and colonial administrators. Prior to the arrival of these outsiders, Pacific Island societies had developed a system of acquiring, refining and disseminating knowledge that satiated the needs of their societies extremely well. However, interest in and literatures on alternative, non-Western epistemologies were non-existent until less than a decade ago. This was principally attributed to the erroneous and exclusive acceptance of the Western epistemology as being the right and most appropriate one.
Indigenous education

While indigenous education in Oceania share many common elements, there are distinctive features that are unique to the different countries in the region (Thaman, various years; Nabobo, 1994; Teaero, 2001). Variously referred to as ako (Tonga), akoga (Tuvalu) and reirei (Kiribati), indigenous education is concerned with the maintenance and continuation of culture. An important element of this is the enforcement of conformity among members of the young generations to the cultural norms, values and practices. This demands that the “truth” is not actively and openly challenged as it is in the Western education system.

Knowledge in its various forms (navigation, house building, medicine, etc) in Oceanic societies is collectively owned by particular clans and families and extensive efforts are exerted to ensure that knowledge remains within the given boundaries. This is critically important as knowledge is a crucial component of the mana of members of the various clans. Knowledge is not disseminated arbitrarily but is given only to the deserving ones – meaning, members of the clan only. Some forms of knowledge are expected to be known by all members of society. This is referred to as “open knowledge” (Nabobo 1994; Teaero 2001). Sometimes, knowledge is given in higher degrees depending on the situation. This is referred to as “negotiated knowledge” (Teaero 2001). The really important component of knowledge is reserved only for the select few. This is called “closed knowledge” (Nabobo 1994) or “privileged knowledge” (Teaero 2001).

The degrees to which knowledge has also been categorized in various indigenous education systems. At the pinnacle of the aims of indigenous education is wanawana in Kiribati (Teaero 2001), yalomatua in Fiji (Nabobo 1994), poto in Tonga (Thaman 1988). All of these terms collectively define the educated person as someone who possesses the highest possible level of knowledge, knows the customs, can apply knowledge for the benefit of the community and has reached maturity in both character and the mind.

Table 1: A comparison of some of the features of Indigenous and Western education.
(Based on Thaman, Nabobo and Teaero).

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<th>Features</th>
<th>Indigenous education in Oceania</th>
<th>Western education</th>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Open.</td>
<td>Closed and changing incrementally over time. Owned collectively by members of clan.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Individual ownership.</td>
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<td>Learning</td>
<td>Open.</td>
<td>Restricted.</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Often, strangers.</td>
<td>Family members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Actively encouraged.</td>
<td>Discouraged as it could easily be seen as challenges to a teacher’s authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment of the “truth”</td>
<td>Questioned. Interrogated.</td>
<td>Accepted unconditionally.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tree of Opportunity
It is obvious from the above that there are inherent contradictions between the Western and indigenous educational ideas, processes and practices.

There are two important points here. Firstly, it is both reasonable and appropriate to accept that there are “multiple perspectives” on reality. The perspectives from the various countries of Oceania are among these and must, in the first instance, be prioritised in the school curriculum by virtue of belonging to the local culture. Secondly, in the light of the history of formal education in this region, it appears that a dominant perspective on reality that has underpinned formal educational programmes in the region has been that of the west.

The metaphor of the Tree of Opportunity (Fig. 1) proposed by regional educators (Institute of Education 2002) identifies key components that should be used as a basis for educational programmes in Oceania. These are: local processes and skills, knowledge, arts and crafts, institutions, languages, values, beliefs, histories and worldviews. All of these can be meaningfully translated into the context of art and used to underpin art education programmes. The metaphor does not attempt to exclude other “truths” and processes. Rather, it argues that education should initially be built from within the cultures it serves and then other relevant ideas and processes could be accommodated without disrupting the essence of the ‘tree’.

ART EDUCATION IN THE PACIFIC

Justifications for the inclusion of art in the school curricula

Delegates at this conference are well aware of the justifications for the inclusion of art in the school curricula and its role in human development. Moreover, important aspects of art education have been covered by other presenters in this meeting. However, it is worth reiterating some of the justifications that are especially relevant for schools in the region.

Eisner (1972) offers two justifications for the inclusion of art in schools - the contextualist and essentialist arguments. The contextualist viewpoint emphasizes the critical importance of the context in which an educational programme occurs. Eisner (1972:2) argues that “goals, means and ends of educational programmes “can be properly determined if one understands the context in which that program is to function”. In explaining the essentialist perspective, Eisner writes that

... art is a unique aspect of human culture and experience, and that the most valuable contribution that art can make to human experience is that which is directly related to its characteristics. What art has to contribute to the education is precisely what other fields cannot contribute.

In providing justifications for the inclusion of art in schools in the region, Kaye (1984) offers five arguments: cultural, social, psychological, economic and security. He noted that art was decreasingly playing a central role in the lives of people in the region and pointed out the rich artistic heritage was in danger of disappearing if it is not actively supported by schools and the community.
Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives, especially with regard to the affective domain. Our education systems have over the decades helped to inculcate in young people values that are at odds to traditional ones, culminating in a mismatch between these young people and the environment they live in.


The arts and cultures of indigenous Oceanic societies received little more than mere rhetoric in curriculum development. They were given token attention at best or totally ignored at worst. Aspects of culture were taught in many schools but were given superficial treatment in the curriculum through more innocuous forms like dance, legends and some simple crafts. In art, as with many other subjects, there was little more than a shift away from the United Kingdom’s Cambridge "O" and "A" Levels School Certificates to the New Zealand School Certificate (South Pacific) Option. The latter was perceived by policy makers to be more relevant. There has been no conscious effort by most Ministries of Education to develop an art curriculum that is specific to Oceanic societies. The exceptions are Solomon Islands, Samoa and, to some extent, Kiribati. Samoa runs a small Fine Arts School at Leulumoega Fou College. Solomon Islands has developed and implemented a comprehensive art curriculum for secondary schools that was firmly grounded on the rich artistic traditions of that country. This programme was philosophically justified thus:

Education in the creative arts is an important part of a child's education and it contributes to mental, physical and spiritual growth. Through study and participation in the creative arts children learn about their cultural heritage, learn how they can contribute to their culture in positive ways, learn to educate their senses and so be more sensitive and aware of their environment, gain skills and technical ability in the creative arts and enjoy success in their personal expression about what they think, how they feel and how they make sense of the world. It develops a child's creativity.

(Solomon Islands, 1990:4)

The Solomon Islands’ Creative Arts Syllabus for Forms 1-5 provides a very useful model. The syllabus recognizes art and other creative arts areas in the curriculum. More importantly in terms of art, it provides opportunities for students to study art from the cultural, historical and production perspectives.

Literature on the formal education systems in Oceania and reports on various aspects of the same systems have been growing steadily. Alarmingly, a cursory examination of many of these reveal that countries in the region have been confronted with numerous formidable challenges. ‘Ana Taufé’ulungaki (1987:88), an eminent Tongan educationist, sums up the problem very well:

The education system of all the countries in the region have been borrowed and adapted from the education systems of their colonial masters, and before independence, it was not only the systems that they borrowed but almost everything connected with them: the style of administration used, the curricula they implemented, the qualifications
they offered, the training of their personnel, the resources they used, and in most cases the very aims and purposes of their education systems.

It has been acknowledged by Pacific Island educators that despite mammoth budgetary allocations to formal educational programmes, formal education has persistently met with astronomical failures regarding educational opportunities to the people at large (Institute of Education 2002). Common reasons being canvassed include:

1. the very highly selective system of admitting students to secondary and higher levels of education;
2. largely irrelevant educational programmes;
3. inadequate resources, including staffing, and, most importantly,
4. ignorance of or refusal to acknowledge the critical importance of indigenous educational thoughts and practice.

'Ana Taufe'ulungaki (2002:15) points this problem out:

The failure of education in the Pacific can be attributed in large measure to the imposition of an alien system designed for Western social and cultural contexts, which are underpinned by quite different values. The indicators which are used in the Pacific to measure educational performance at the regional and national levels have largely been imported from elsewhere and very little effort has been made to contextualize them. It is often assumed that they are value-free and that they are appropriate to the contexts in which they are applied.

The curriculum, pedagogical approaches used and teaching/learning assumptions held in all schools in the Pacific were for a long time exclusively based on the cultures, worldviews and values of the colonial powers. In the climate of resource scarcity that characterize many economies in the region, globalisaiton, and a prioritization of the supposedly more useful subjects, the arts in general and art in particular have always borne the brunt of being nudged out of centre stage in the educational arena.

The coming of independence in 1960s onwards prompted countries of the region to re-look at their education systems and to question their appropriateness and relevance to the contemporary needs of their societies. Curriculum reform and development in most of the other subject areas followed soon after. In art, the marginalized subject in all systems and the neglected one in most systems of education in the region, has been receiving scant attention. This conference, therefore, represents a significant step in the right direction.

Problems in art education

Art education in the region has been faced with formidable problems like – among others – marginalization in schools’ subject offerings at best or exclusion at worst, irrelevance, lack of resources, shortage in some countries and lack of trained teachers in most countries.
One of the fundamental challenges confronting formal education in the region today is the predominantly functionalist view of education Teaero (1999). Formal education has been and continues to be widely regarded from this functionalist perspective from which it is expected to culminate in learners ultimately getting paid employment and is the most important factor in parents’ views (Burnett 1998). This has resulted in the persistent marginalization of art in the school curriculum.

There has been a chronic and acute shortage of trained art teachers in the region. This is due principally to the perception held by policy makers, educational leaders at the Ministry and school level and parents of art as being an insignificant subject and one that is of no assistance at all in securing paid employment. Some teacher training colleges in the region do not even have art in their course offerings.

Much of the curriculum objectives in subjects are being actively taught in schools in the region are based on subject curriculum objectives and not necessarily on behaviour that appropriate to societies and competencies to perform role expectations.

Observations in classrooms in Fiji, Kiribati and Marshall Islands reveal that art in primary schools is used only as a “filler” subject. In this sense, students are allowed to engage in art only if there is nothing else to do in the classroom. In Fiji, art is taught as part of what is referred to as PEMAC. This consists of Physical Education, Music, Art and Crafts. These subjects are again being marginalized.

Most art education programmes in schools appear to place an over-emphasis on technical skill and an almost blanket exclusion of the other important art skills. This is unsatisfactory as artistic encounters for students must embrace other important experiences too such as criticism, aesthetics and the situating of the learning encounter within the cultural and historical context.
THE ROLES OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE ART EDUCATION CURRICULA AT THE PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN THE PACIFIC

It will become abundantly clear from the preceding sections of this paper that:

1. countries in Oceania have their own unique cultures which have been developed over millennia and which continue to evolve today, and that these cultures are very diverse;

2. countries in Oceania have their own unique art forms which have been developed over millennia and which continue to evolve today, and that these art forms are very diverse;

3. countries in Oceania have their own unique educational thoughts, processes, practices and systems, and that these are not being used in schools;

4. formal education in the region continues to be the prerogative of a minority and is experiencing numerous daunting problems, and

5. art education is severely marginalized in the school curriculum.

In this section, we shall consider some roles that relevant aspects of indigenous culture and education could play if they are integrated into school curriculum.

Making teaching and learning more culturally-relevant and culturally-inclusive

The debates promoting relevance in education in Oceania have been going since independence swept the region. Translated into action, these have taken the form of curriculum and staff development. While curriculum development started making inroads into the inclusion of relevant aspects of life in the islands, these continued to be taught using the same assumptions that underlined the teaching and learning processes that were based on inappropriate cultures. The inclusion of appropriate aspects of indigenous educational practices in the way the curriculum is organised, developed and taught would make it more culturally-relevant and inclusive. Educators in Oceania are now becoming increasingly aware of the currency of the wisdom of their ancestors and the relevance of their indigenous cultures, educational systems and art (Thaman, various years; Nabobo 1994; Mel 2002; Teaero 2001). Systematic inclusions of these would assist in the on-going task of re-defining the educated citizen of Oceania in an increasingly globalised world.

Re-placing the education process at the centre of society

Knowledge is something that is actively constructed by individuals within society in which they live using their own peculiar background, experiences and prior understandings. As such, this understanding of the world (or knowledge) consists of what he refers to as ethnocentrically derived understandings of reality. The argument that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals in a socio-cultural setting is premised on the work of Vygotsky (1978). It has a lot of relevance for Pacific societies. Inclusions and studies of important aspects of knowledge in the primary curriculum would place education at the centre of society instead of being something detached from everyday life.
Stronger foundations for learning are built at the early stages if art that is based on the culture and environment of the region is included in the curriculum. Children are naturally curious about their environment and culture and would benefit from explorations into these in the school from an early stage. Such early meaningful encounters also provide strong foundations for later learning in general and art in particular.

Promotion of indigenous ways of seeing

In the DBAE approach being canvassed, there are opportunities for learners to come to develop competencies in and familiarity with indigenous ways of seeing – or ethno-aesthetics. Like education in general, aesthetics is ethnocentric and is not culture-free. Competencies in this area would promote better understanding of the learners’ own environment at the outset but, more importantly, it would introduce the learner into the broader and deeper scheme of things within the larger social setting as perceived by members of that society. Art itself, as pointed out by Subramani (2000), could become a very useful “way of knowing” and understanding one’s world.

Self-actualisation in Oceania.

As pointed out earlier, the school systems in Oceania consistently propose an undesirable proportion of push-outs. Empirical evidence suggests that among those who get pushed out are those who have competence in art as it is conceived today – that is, the ability to produce representational renderings of aspects of life. An inclusion of art in the broader sense in the primary curriculum and an offering of these in the primary curriculum would offer opportunities for many of these learners to acquire culturally-relevant competencies and to develop these more fully later in life. This, in turn, would make education more meaningful and rewarding.

Promotion of environmentally-friendly programmes

Indigenous culture, education and art develop within a particular environment. As such they are firmly grounded in that environment in a very close relationship. The environment provides materials and inspirations for artists and craftspeople. Materials that are readily available in the environment have been ingeniously utilized to produce some of the best art in the world. By embedding art programmes in the realm of indigenous art and culture, the locally available natural resources would form the basis for artistic endeavours in primary schools.

Promotion of a sense of belongingness and ownership

As argued by Kaye (1984) in his psychological justification for the inclusion of art in schools in the region, the arts would promote a strong sense of belonging for learners. An art curriculum that includes salient aspects of an indigenous culture, indigenous educational thoughts and practices as integral components of its operations would promote in learners and stakeholders a strong sense of belongingness and ownership of that system. It then follows that this sense of ownership would, in turn, facilitate both acceptance and support.

Oceania is a culturally diverse region and her artists will inevitably evolve new pathways and new ways of adapting their arts and cultural heritages
to their new concerns and realities. To view Oceanic arts using only one perspective would not only be anti-educational but would miss the point altogether. (Thaman 1999:4)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The time is right and in fact long overdue for the development of an art curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices that are strongly grounded on the indigenous cultures and educational thoughts, practices and processes in Oceania. The following recommendations are made with a view to making greater use of indigenous cultures, knowledge and art in the art curriculum in primary schools in the region.

1. There is a need to conduct further research into the (i) indigenous educational systems, thoughts and practices and (ii) arts in general and art in particular in many countries of the region. While some inroads have already been made in terms of research on indigenous education in countries like Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji and Kiribati, more work remains to be done.

2. Following on from 1 above, a selection of the more important aspects of these needs to be made and included in the primary art curriculum in the light of a combination of what is currently known about learning in the formal education sense and in the indigenous education sense.

3. Policy makers in education, school leaders, teachers and parents need to be sensitized about the wisdom and values of integrating aspects of indigenous knowledge, cultures, values, beliefs and art in the school curriculum – especially in legislation and policies, curriculum, pedagogies, teacher education and training, assessment and evaluations, management and administration and resourcing of education (Institute of Education 2002:38).

4. Public support, especially from those who are actively engaging in the arts, need to be promoted.

5. “Caretakers of indigenous knowledge be mobilized, and their support and contributions recruited.” (Institute of Education 2002:139).

6. Teachers of art must be trained in the formal sense. The content of such training should also include learning about indigenous art, cultures and educational thoughts and practices.

7. An inclusion of the arts among the core offerings of schools at the primary and secondary levels is recommended as this contributes positively towards a child’s overall learning and about the culture in general. In addition, learning opportunities in art must be closely integrated with learning in other subjects as well as opportunities in the community.

8. Regular revisions of the art curriculum is a necessity in the light of the constantly shifting and changing world, local concerns and realities.
Discipline-Based Art Education

The Discipline Based Art Education (BDAE) model espoused by the Getty Centre for Education in the Arts (Eisner 1987) has several strong points that could be profitably adapted and adopted in developing an art curriculum for islands in this region. The DBAE model identifies four areas that ought to concurrently form core of the contents of art education. These areas are:

1. art history (cultural and historical contexts);
2. studio practice (techniques for expression);
3. aesthetics (nature and values in art), and
4. art criticism (judgments about art).

The Solomon Islands Creative Arts Syllabus for Forms 1-5 is basically the same except that it combines ‘art appreciation’ and ‘art criticism’ into one component: critical responding sensitive appreciation (Solomon Islands 1994). Regardless of nomenclature, the point remains: this model provides the opportunity to include ethno-aesthetics to be used in the study of art in schools.

Core questions

The pertinent questions that curriculum planners at the national level need to ask themselves are:

- What opportunities do we need provide in order to develop learners’ creative abilities?
- What opportunities do we need provide in order To learn to appreciate fine art?
- What opportunities do we need provide in order To become skilled at the production of art forms?
- What opportunities do we need provide in order To learn more about our own cultures?

These questions are particularly relevant to the task at hand, especially as attempts are being made to incorporate indigenous cultural values and indigenous educational notions in the school curricula in the various countries of the region. Education should be concerned with a widening of opportunities that would facilitate the enrichment of learning.

A standard curriculum framework

It is acknowledged that the development of an ideal art curriculum in schools is the responsibility of individual countries. These guidelines for a framework for curriculum development in art for the region are merely being offered as suggestions for the primary purpose of assisting countries with the development of a curriculum that is workable and practicable.
Table 3: Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Play, explorations, production.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Play, explorations, production.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Play, explorations, production, discussions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Play, explorations, production, discussions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Production, discussions, reflection.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list in the second column is not comprehensive, as the purpose of the table is to provide an example that could be used to design an appropriate framework. Items in that column are based on what is known from cognitive psychologists who provide the following five levels in the acquisition and development of knowledge: Intuitive knowledge, First Order Symbolic knowledge, Notational Systems, Formal Bodies of Knowledge, and Skilled Knowledge. Some art theorists (Eisner 1987) favour an early introduction of the formal art skills (such as in the DBAE model) while others (Gardner 1990) are more cautious, favouring a more gradual introduction of the formal skills. Whatever approach is followed, all these need to be situated within the context of Oceania.

Strands

The first task would be an identification of the areas to be covered in the various arts forms and then list them.

Table 3: Strands of art.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Arts</th>
<th>Performing Arts</th>
<th>Crafts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design (motifs, tattoo patterns).</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>Weaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting.</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Carving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etc.</td>
<td>Etc.</td>
<td>Etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each of the strands, curriculum planners and developers need to critically provide clear visions and guidelines for the primary art curriculum with regard to the following items based on their unique contexts and national goals that take into cognizance the other salient points raised in this paper:

1. Goals
2. Rationale
3. Content: aesthetics, art criticism, art history, art production.
4. Context
5. Pedagogy
6. Assessment

Consultations would, by necessity, involve the broadest range of stakeholders and community experts.

CONCLUSIONS

Oceania consists of numerous countries that have their own distinctive cultures, art forms, indigenous educational thoughts, processes and practices. One common factor that has characterized their formal education systems is the subjugation of indigenous education on the premise of being irrelevant, the exclusive use over many decades of Western assumptions on teaching and learning and a marginalization of the arts in the school curriculum. This has culminated in many failures and the production of a citizenry that is culturally alienated from their mother cultures.

The Dakar Framework for Action (World Education Forum 2000) identifies universal access to good quality primary education as one of six priorities for all countries. The curriculum contents at that level should, by necessity, include the arts. Quality art education programmes in this sense should be judged to be that which include and are based on the specific indigenous cultures, knowledge systems and art of the country in which that programme is offered. This, in itself, would ensure that the curriculum being developed is both culture-sensitive and culturally-inclusive.

An inclusion of art that is based on the best of both indigenous and exogenous educational thoughts and practices, and properly contextualized, would be (i) an effective means of salvation for a significant proportion of our school push-outs and (ii) a basis for developing a strong, culturally inclusive curriculum.

Contextualising the primary art curriculum in the relevant aspects of the cultures of the region could become a useful part of the process of de-constructing inappropriate knowledge, pedagogy and content and a re-defining of our teaching/learning objectives, contents and outcomes in ways that are firmly grounded in our cultures and contexts.

This paper has outlined the more salient points regarding culture, indigenous education and art in the region. It then provided starting points for discussion that would hopefully lead to the more positive utilization of these aspects of culture in the education systems in each of the countries of the region.
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