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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING: A CASE STUDY OF TUTU RURAL TRAINING CENTRE IN TAVEUNI, FIJI

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ABSTRACT

Conventional western education has effectively become global education and yet it is largely unchallenged. The few who dare to challenge, what is arguably orthodox development's main ally, highlight concerns. Education, it is argued, promotes elite capture, homogenises diversity, and disconnects students from their own communities and places that give their lives meaning. Formal education is fundamental to economic growth. It prepares people for work and carries the message of materialism. However, this study argues economic growth brings income disparity creating extremes of wealth and poverty, resource depletion and major environmental issues, further challenging education's emphasis.

This study sought to find an alternative approach to education. This approach is informed by postdevelopment thinking, indigenous values and indigenous education. Place-based education is an existing education modality which was found to conform to postdevelopment principles. A case study of Tutu Rural Training Centre in Taveuni, Fiji was used to explore if the training provided could be described as place-based education. Wellbeing is investigated and presented as an indicator of education effectiveness. The enhancement of community wellbeing, therefore, is used to assess Tutu RTC in comparision to formal education.

This research found that Tutu RTC was far more effective than formal schooling in enhancing the wellbeing of the Tutu community. It also found Tutu RTC could be described as indigenous education, postdevelopment-informed education, and place-based education. Generalisations were made from these findings that have implications for the policy, practice and philosophy of the global business of formal education.

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I was grateful to Father Michael McVerry, Principal of Tutu RTC, for accepting my request for fieldwork at his centre and all the Tutu staff who welcomed me warmly, showed unerring generosity, and participated in the fieldwork without reservation. In particular I am humbled and indebted to the trainees, the young adults of Tutu who hosted, assisted, participated, and shared what they had to make my time welcomed and fruitful. They are the proof of the success of Tutu and a witness to the 'goodness' of Fijian culture.

My inspiration for this study came from my father who embarked on a degree at the age of 75, having left school in the fourth form, confirming the adage 'it's never too late', and from my siblings whose philosophical conversations have provoked much thought and debate for 5 decades. It is easy to underestimate the work required to complete a thesis. If I knew in advance the time required I would not have started. However each of my children Liam, Reilly and Ellen have encouraged me and added their wisdom having had first-hand experience of the discipline needed throughout the journey to their own degrees. Lastly to my wife and soul mate Mary, you have been tested during this process but you have been rock solid and I have benefited from your belief, strength and wise council.

Finally, I dedicate this study to the millions of teachers worldwide who deliver classes every day with a smile in spite of the student disinterest caused by the inherent difficulties of an often unjust, irrelevant, discriminating and disconnecting system of schooling. This is written so that one day you, and those in your charge, may be released from that burden.

Steve Connor
Christchurch, New Zealand
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ABBREVIATIONS

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MCP	Married Couples Programme
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Fiji Ministry of Education
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee
NCBBF	National Council for Building a Better Fiji
NFE	Non-formal education
NGOs	Non-government organisations
NZ	New Zealand
PBE	Place-based education
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Policies
TNCs	Transnational corporations
Tutu RTC	Tutu Rural Training Centre
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Education Fund
US	United States of America
USP	University of the South Pacific
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WWII	World War Two
YFC	Young Farmer's Course
SYWC	Single Young Women's Course

GLOSSARY

Charter Schools	privately run deregulated schools in the US
community economy	informal and non-formal community-centred business
dalo	taro
disvalue	diminishes value
diverse economy	mix of community and formal economy
Ethno-Fijian	Indigenous Fijian, also now used is iTaukei
extrinsic wellbeing	'means' to wellbeing
formal economy	taxable economy
formal education	conventional mainstream education
global project	the shifting from development through government to development through the global market
green economy	community economy
grey economy	global capitalist formal economy
hegemony	positioning and normalising constructs as superior
hermeneutics	iterative approach to text interpretation
hybrids	a mix of philosophically distinct approaches for mutual benefit
Indo-Fijian	Fijians with Indian heritage
informal economy	exchanges of goods and services that do not involve money
informal education	learning that occurs incidentally outside formal systems
intrinsic wellbeing	wellbeing directly resulting from the action, 'ends' wellbeing
Kapa Haka	NZ Maori dance
kava	intoxicating drink made from the root of the *yaqona* plant
korero	speech in Maori
Kura Kaupapa	a Maori indigenous education alternative
Mahi Tahi	formerly Catholic Overseas Volunteers
mana	Maori term for having respect and dignity
Maori	NZ indigenous peoples
mataqali	clan
neocolonialism	a new colonialism imposed through the global market
non-formal economy	exchange of goods and services for money which is not taxed
non-formal education	organised learning outside the formal education system
pakeha	Maori term for non-Maori
Partnership Schools	NZ name for Charter Schools
place-based	centred in the locality (place) where people reside
reinhabit	reconnecting to all aspects of the place where people reside
sautu	Fijian word for wellbeing
Tangata Whenua	Maori term for people of the land
the good life	living in a state of wellbeing
triangulation	collecting data through alternative methods
vakaturaga	chiefly principles
Vanua	land, culture, people and their interrelationships
whakapapa	Maori for genealogy
Whanau Ora	cultural sovereignty for NZ Maori social services
yaqona	kava in plant or in powered form